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ABSTRACT

This manual is designed to provide adolescents and young adults who have disabilities with a blueprint for setting and achieving goals, making decisions, acquiring needed supports, and achieving a self-determined and sustainable lifestyle. A planning process called Group Action Planning is used as a foundation for self-determination, with guidelines provided for establishing an Action Planning Group, choosing a facilitator, getting stakeholders and peers involved in the group, and conducting meetings. Techniques for brainstorming, goal-setting, decision making, conflict resolution, and negotiation are described. Common pitfalls of group planning for self-determination are diagnosed and solutions suggested, including problems of interpersonal chemistry, clashes between parents and the planning group, and uninspired leadership. A separate section of the manual is dedicated to celebrating successes, including anecdotes from individuals who have achieved their goals through the group planning method. A resource guide lists self-determination projects in 19 states, books, videotapes, articles, curricula, and national information and advocacy groups. (PB)

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GROUP ACTION PLANNING:

An Innovative Manual for Building a Self-Determined Future

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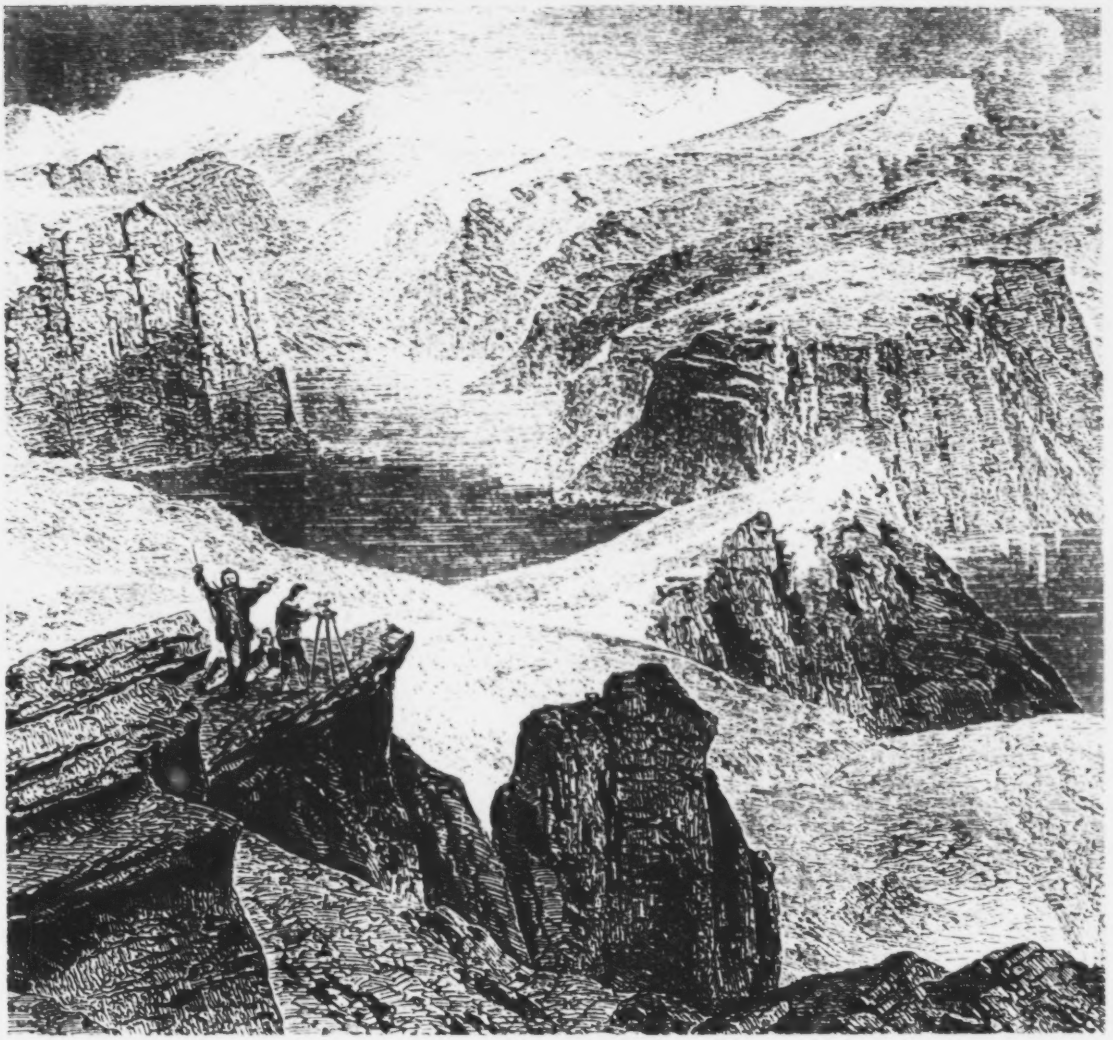

September, 1995

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We owe considerable gratitude to Ann P. Turnbull and H. Rutherford Turnbull, III, who developed the concept of Group Action Planning. Their efforts have resulted in the establishment of the Beach Center on Families and Disability, a research and training center devoted to families whose members have disabilities. The Turnbulls' support has been invaluable in the successful completion of our project's goals and objectives.

We would like to extend our greatest thanks to the students and families who agreed to participate in the Self-Determination Project. We were honored to share their experiences and grateful for their generous donation of time and effort. We felt that we became a part of their lives, and we wish them all the best!

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- Are you transitioning into a new phase of life?
- Are you unhappy with your current situation?
- Are there goals that you would like to achieve?
- Are you isolated and in need of support?
- Are you unsatisfied with your educational and vocational plans?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, Group Action Planning may be the solution!

This manual on Group Action Planning intends to provide a blueprint for reaching your goals, making your own decisions, acquiring needed supports, and achieving a self-determined future. This manual is one of the products created by the Self-Determination Through Group Action Planning project of Full Citizenship, Inc. The project was funded by the United States Department of Education as a model demonstration project designed to foster self-determination in youths with disabilities, ages 14 to 21. Our project included two major components: a semester elective course taught at the high school level and an innovative planning process called Group Action Planning. This manual focuses on disseminating information related to the Group Action Planning process.

We will begin by defining the term, self-determination. Self-determination is a system of attitudes, skills, and relationships that develop over time and which are dynamic and fluid.

For an individual, self-determination includes interdependence; self-regulation; knowledge and acceptance of self; the ability to learn from experiences; internal motivation to learn and utilize skills such as communication, goal-setting, decision-making, and conflict resolution; and most importantly the perception of control and choice in one's life.

In the environment, the expression of self-determination is enhanced by responsive, informative, and non-judgmental feedback; the negotiation of constructive limits; the creation of situations that are optimally challenging for the individual; effective communication strategies; and the provision of non-controlling support.

Group Action Planning is an integral step towards self-determination. If one can effectively move through the Group Action Planning process, one is, in essence, self-determined. Building skills and having opportunities to express those skills are essential components of both self-determination and the Group Action Planning process.

Group Action Planning is an effective way to systematically foster self-determination as its dual approach focuses on the needs of the individual and the environment. Group Action Planning builds a solid system of support which is long-term and interdependent. The Group Action Planning Process focuses on action and movement, perceptions of which are critical to the success of the group. Action Planning Groups link families and individuals with their communities, empower group members, and create a safe and supportive environment for the individual and family.

Our goal with this manual is to explain in detail the Group Action Planning process. We hope that our readers will be able to start Action Planning Groups for people in their communities. We have included quotes and real life vignettes of people who have participated in Action Planning Groups (using pseudonyms) in hopes that their powerful stories will lead our readers to dream of building a self-determined future.

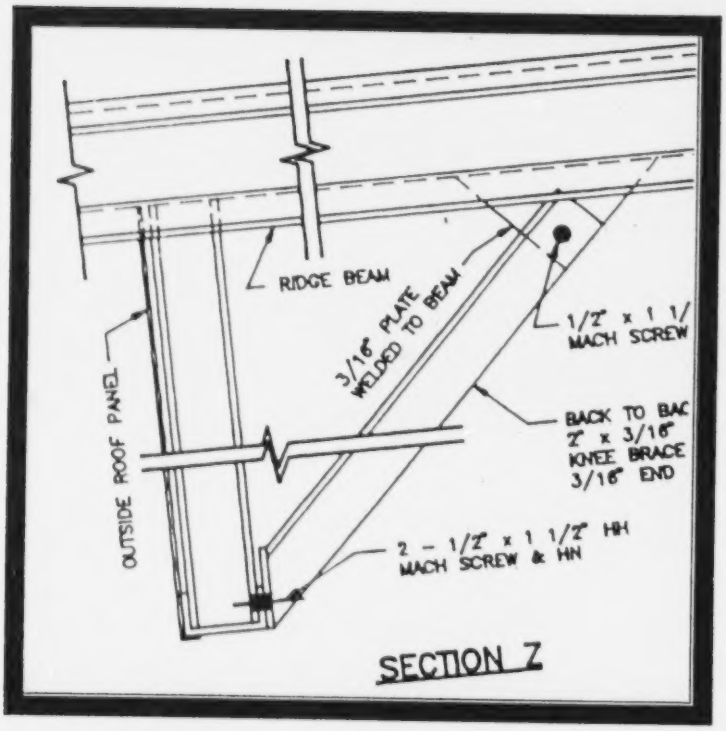
Readers will walk through each successive chapter of this manual, building a bridge to a future they have envisioned for themselves. In each chapter, we have addressed the logistics (or the who, what, where, when, why, and how) of Group Action Planning, facilitation, and the needs and responsibilities of key players. Each chapter emphasizes a different aspect of this building process utilizing various "construction materials." We have included tips and worksheets created

by Action Planning Group members. The tips and tools shared by people who have participated in Action Planning Groups are included for the reader to share with their group members and to implement in their meetings. We can all learn from one another as we share our success stories and our stumbling blocks.

Throughout this manual we will refer to key players in the Group Action Planning (GAP) process. Two terms we will use throughout the manual are "GAP leader" and "facilitator." The GAP leader is the architect of the plan. His or her life plans are the focus of the meetings. The facilitator helps the Action Planning Group identify and solve problems, establish and achieve goals, and communicate with each other. The facilitator plays a unique role — he or she is not the leader, nor the focus of the meeting. The facilitator's sole responsibility is to ease the process, a complicated and crucial task. While the facilitator oversees the construction, it is the GAP leader, as architect, whose blueprint becomes reality.

We hope you enjoy reading this manual and even more, we hope that you use this information to start an Action Planning Group for someone in your community. It is a wonderful process, a wonderful way to change a person's life — maybe even your own.

GAP Blueprint



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GAP Blueprint

"That is the whole intention behind the GAP process, if I understand it right, is that people aren't doing this out of an obligation, or that this is their community service for the month, or anything. They go there [to the GAP meetings] because it's fun, it's fun to sit down and talk about how to make things better for this person. You know, you're having something to eat, it's a casual situation, it's not a meeting where everybody's uptight and has to have gotten things done. It's more a discussion about the great things that he has achieved this week and the great things that other people have achieved, and how they can work together to help each other in the following weeks. And they may not always have common interests with each other (that's one way to have a group come together), but they can disagree adamantly about philosophy or religion or really any of those heavy issues. But as long as they have a strong interest in him, and he cares about them, that seems to be what allows the group to continually reinvent itself. And the family and he is always consistent, and usually a few other long-term, key people, but other people come in and out as, you know, friendships change over time. And so, then, the group never dies."

"I wish I had my own GAP group. Just because everybody needs, you know, support about decisions they make in their life that are hard. And if you had this team of people to help you make these decisions, then it just takes some of the burden off of you. And you know at different times, if he's got a question about a relationship with someone, he may not feel comfortable going to his mom and dad, but he might feel okay going to [the GAP facilitator] to talk about it, or somebody else in the group, and just having those friends [to count on]."

Overview

Although Group Action Planning (GAP) is unique for each family and each situation, there are some structural guidelines for implementation. The focus of the group is always the individual and/or the family for whom you are meeting. Other group members may include anyone who is involved in the life of the person for whom you are meeting, for example, family, friends, neighbors, teachers, service providers, job-coaches, employers, co-workers, extended family members, transportation providers, and others. Be creative about the people you invite: Who else besides the job coach and the teacher can be involved when talking about employment? What about the employer, managers, co-workers, and consumers or people utilizing the services of that particular business?

Group membership may fluctuate as needs wax and wane or the focus changes; however, it is critical that a core group of supporters remains intact. The core will stabilize and maintain consistency for the group over time.

The location of the meetings is an important element in the process. The environment needs to be a safe place for the person for whom you are meeting. Territory issues are real and should not be denied. The environment can be incredibly disempowering for the individual and his or her family if it is one where they are uncomfortable or not-in-control. Groups should meet anywhere that is comfortable and if at all possible neutral. Suggestions include group members' homes, a library or community building, restaurant, church, school, or a local agency.

Chairs need to be arranged in a circle to avoid a feeling of "us against them" with the family on one side and professionals on the other. The circle arrangement also facilitates open and honest communication — a critical success factor in Group Action Planning.

Groups may meet whenever is most convenient and as often as is necessary. Our groups have generally met on a monthly basis, with more frequent meetings during times of crises or upcoming deadlines. It is essential to remember that this group is about action, the perception of which is critical to the overall success of the group. Therefore groups need to meet regularly and fairly often, with each group member working on his or her tasks between meetings.

The "how" of Group Action Planning is explained in depth throughout the rest of the manual. In essence, it is a group of people coming together to envision the future and work towards those outlined goals. GAP focuses on the system as a whole and the individual within that system, and it promotes self-determination through involvement, support, and experience.

Cultural Considerations

One's culture frames both the definition of self-determination and the process of becoming self-determined through Group Action Planning. Self-determination is, as defined in the literature, in many ways a "white, western, linear, and product oriented" concept [1] that consequently needs to be culturally reframed to better fit minority individuals with disabilities, their families, and their support networks. While limited space does not allow us to do justice to all the issues surrounding diversity, we will present some guidelines that have been helpful to us in reframing the concepts of self-determination.

Considering the individuals' and their families' cultural context, including number of generations living in the dominant culture, family composition, and supports within their community is helpful in reframing self-determination. Are the self-determination skills they are learning congruent with their cultural values? Will these skills be appreciated as self-determination when expressed in a culturally relevant manner?

Staying flexible in the expectations and presentation of decision-making strategies is important, for individual families may approach problems, set goals, and make decisions in unique ways. Honoring how the family has successfully initiated positive change in the past is the best predictor of future success. What has worked? Who have been the key players? Identifying the unique change process of a given family may not be easy. Reflecting on the family's context and responding in a manner congruent with the family's values may facilitate this identification.

Finally, recognize how the individuals' and their families' culturally-relevant skills can be used successfully within the dominant, mainstream culture. We believe that "...minority [individuals] with disabilities..., like their parents and families, stand with one foot in their family culture and another foot in the dominant culture." [2] How can individuals and their families successfully utilize newly-acquired skills in the larger social context while still acknowledging the validity of their family-cultural context? Facilitating an adaptation to the dominant culture while preserving family-cultural traditions is a complicated task, often requiring creativity and a willingness to learn about the family's cultures from the family themselves. Interestingly, such an approach benefits group members from both dominant and minority contexts by widening the array of perspectives and options available.

Facilitation

The facilitator plays a key role in the GAP process. The facilitator links the family to the community, provides knowledge of and connections to resources, encourages visioning, facilitates communication, mediates conflict, and ensures action, participation, continuity, and accountability. The facilitator learns and promotes the goals of the GAP leader and his or her primary care givers, i.e., parents, siblings, grandparents, or guardian. With this knowledge, the facilitator moves the group as a whole towards the specific goals.

The role of the facilitator is limited but crucial. The facilitator assists the group in identifying and solving problems and making decisions, in order to increase the effectiveness of the group. The facilitator should be someone who is trusted by the individual and his or her family and someone who is willing to make a commitment to the group. The facilitator needs to have strong communication skills and the ability to connect verbally and emotionally with all group members. The role of the facilitator is to ensure movement and communication within the group, to help the group and specifically the GAP leader and his or her family obtain their goals.

The facilitator has very specific responsibilities within the context of the Action Planning Group. He or she is not the leader but the facilitator and as such should in no way be promoting a separate agenda.

Key Players

The roles people play within the context of the GAP are very important. Although everyone contributes by offering support, providing resources, suggesting ideas, and more, there are some specific roles that particular members play.

The role of the GAP leader and the family are the most critical. They provide the leadership for the group. Individuals with disabilities need to participate as much as possible as a part of the group. Their involvement may range from being present and keeping the group on track to leading the meeting, setting the agenda, inviting supports, and creating the action plan. It is critical that they are involved and remain the center or focus of the group; the level of active involvement depends on their ability to be involved. However, even if their abilities are such that their involvement in the group is limited, it is vital that they remain involved to the fullest extent possible. Implementors run the risk of disempowering individuals by assuming control of planning their lives.

The role of the family or primary caregiver should complement the individual's ability to be involved: as the GAP leader's ability to lead the group increases, the role of the family decreases, and vice versa. The importance of the family system should never be ignored. As always, it is essential to remember the importance of the system as a whole. It is also important to remember that the system is constantly moving. Through the life of the GAP, the roles may change, with the GAP leader's role growing while the role of the family, although always a component, lessening.

There are many other roles group members can play, and most are identified with a certain task. The group should identify someone to be a note-taker or secretary, someone to be in charge of refreshments for the next meeting, someone to be in charge of sending invitations, and others who can call members who missed the last meeting. These roles can be played by differ-

ent members for each meeting or assigned for a specific time and then rotated. Everyone can and should be involved as much as possible.

There are other creative roles group members can play, such as the "nay-sayer" or someone to play the devil's advocate. If you are looking at complex or controversial issues, this person can help bring up possible barriers or possible negative consequences. Be sure to rotate this role as no one wants to be the nay-sayer at every meeting! Of course, everyone else should be encouraged to be positive; GAPs do not need a whole room full of nay-sayers.

Another role would be an advocate for the GAP leader. Sometimes meetings can move quickly and people can get lost. The advocate can work with the GAP leader to prepare for the meetings or help him or her participate during the meetings. This ensures that the individual's preferences are being heard and that she or he is participating to the fullest extent possible. Sometimes this role can be played very well by a brother or sister or a grandparent — it needs to be someone who knows the person well and is willing to speak up, speaking for and not instead of, the individual, whenever needed.

Summary

If you can answer "Yes!" to any of the following questions, Group Action Planning may be beneficial for you:

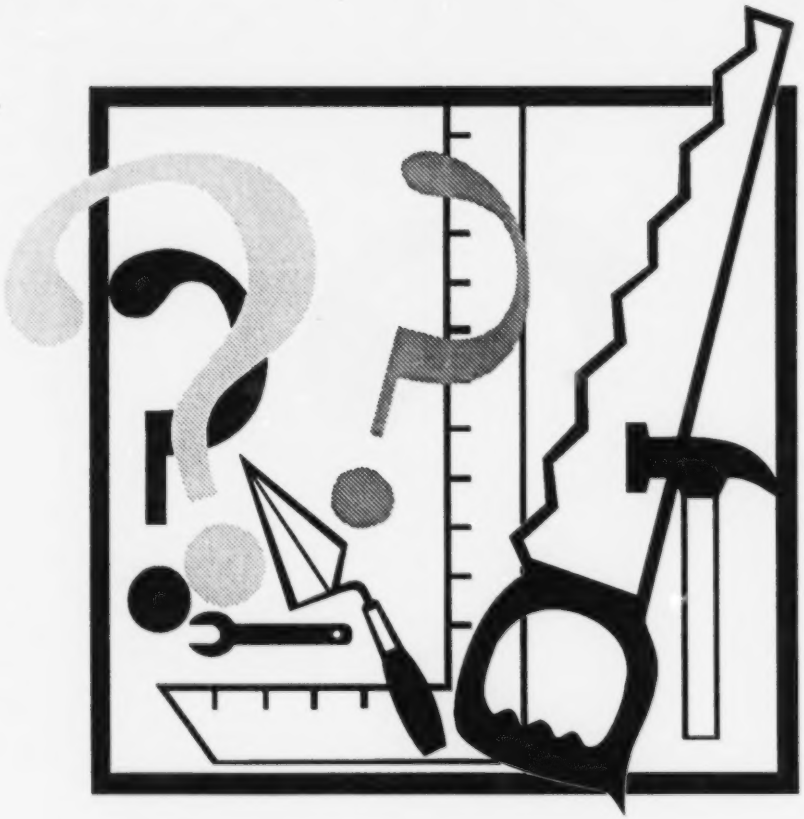
- Are you worried about upcoming changes in your life? Do you worry about things turning out for the best?
- Are you dissatisfied with traditional educational and vocational planning processes?
- Do you see yourself as having gifts and capacities that are underdeveloped or unappreciated?
- Do you need support to achieve your goals?

However, GAP is not for everyone. GAP may not be helpful if:

- The person you suggest GAP to does not want it.
- Immediate family members do not like the GAP idea.
- The time is wrong. (For example, your family is moving or in the divorce process.)
- You are not ready to make the commitment in terms of time, effort, and resources.
- You are satisfied and see no need for change.

If GAP does not sound useful to you right now, we have provided a list of alternative resources at the back of this manual. You may also wish to continue reading this manual; many of the ideas within may be helpful for your family.

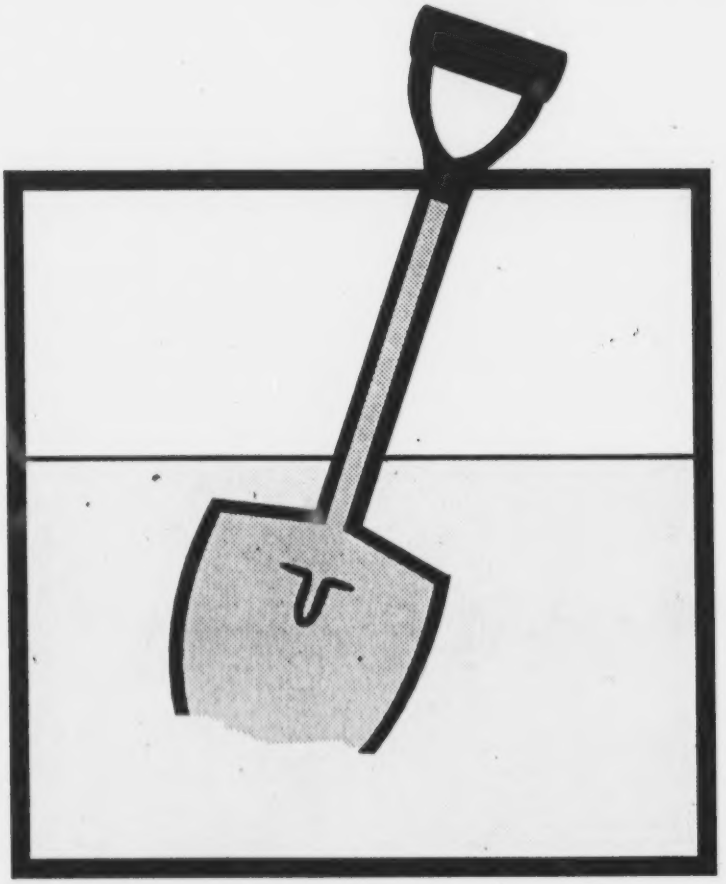
Tips and Tools



Tips for Effective Facilitation

- Do your homework, know what some of the issues may be and what resources are available
- Be non-intrusive
- Lose your ego, don't be defensive or insecure
- Provide only the framework or the skeleton for the meeting
- Empower the individual and his or her family
- Know your community resources
- Ensure that the group perceives action and the possibility for change
- Set the tone by: Being yourself, being relaxed, keeping a sense of humor, being tactful but direct, and allowing open expression of any feelings or ideas
- Be comfortable sharing personal information about yourself when it would be relevant and helpful (appropriate self-disclosure)
- Have strong eye-contact with all members
- Accept hospitality when it is offered
- Be aware of the "comfort" factor, don't be professional or clinical
- Remember efficiency is not the goal, move at a pace that is comfortable for the individual and family
- Gain closure on each issue/goal before moving on, make sure everyone has a real understanding of and commitment to the chosen action plan

Ground Breaking



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Ground Breaking

"The gap group has really made a difference. We have a support network. So that it certainly [is] one thing to be making these decisions totally on our own, and certainly the decisions rest on our shoulders, but we're not isolated. We have a network of people that we can go to, we can talk about this [and] that. It's just like having that net under us. Whereas, I can't imagine, it's a frightening thought, the number of families that have to go through making these decisions [by themselves]. "

Overview

Ground breaking, or getting started, may be the easiest part of Group Action Planning. The reader may already be thinking of a family or individual who is in need of support. The person might be a friend, family member, co-worker, client, student, or neighbor who is seeking employment, graduating from high school, making new friends, moving into an apartment with roommates, or getting a driver's license. If the person needs support to solve a problem or achieve a goal, Group Action Planning may be a solution.

The first step is to approach the person or family, suggest GAP, explain what GAP is, and discuss whether it would work for the person or family. Consideration then needs to be given about who might best facilitate an Action Planning Group. After a family or individual agrees to participate and selects a facilitator, the final task is to arrange a time and place for the family, individual, and facilitator to meet. As outlined above, the place needs to be a comfortable one and the time needs to be convenient for everyone.

Facilitation

If the family or individual is interested in having an Action Planning Group, they need to identify a facilitator. The facilitator plays a crucial role in the GAP process. Talk with the family and individual to discuss potential facilitators, if they will be a good match, and if they have the necessary qualities to be an effective facilitator for the family. The facilitator does not have to be a family member or service provider or have years of training. The facilitator will work best if he or she can connect well with the family, is a good listener, can keep discussions relevant and focused, makes people feel valued, and can help guide the goal-setting and decision-making processes.

An initial planning meeting is helpful for the family and facilitator to become acquainted. It is also an opportunity for the facilitator to learn more about the family and to discuss their history and current issues. The facilitator needs to be prepared to answer questions about GAP and to build rapport with the family. This initial planning meeting allows the facilitator to prepare for the first GAP meeting and to brush up on necessary facilitation skills.

The facilitator can help the GAP leader and family to think through the GAP leader's interests, strengths, and needs. The facilitator can ask questions about the GAP leader's history, current situation, and goals for the immediate and long-term future. The facilitator can also help the family brainstorm potential supportive group members. Important tasks at the planning meeting include building a comfortable relationship with the GAP leader and family, actively listening, and involving the GAP leader to the maximum extent possible.

The facilitator should connect with the GAP leader and family and work with them to think about the future. For example, the facilitator can begin by asking the family what their vision of the future is and what path they want to take in getting there. The facilitator can ask specific questions to help the GAP leader and family think about things such as employment and independent living, post-secondary education, finances, transportation, and other needs or goals. Next, the facilitator should link the family to the community. This task is especially important in the first meetings or when a family is very isolated. The facilitator needs to have knowledge of community resources, key players, and other information to share with the GAP leader and family. (Please refer to the Tips & Tools section of this chapter.) Linking the family to the community opens the doors for the Action Planning Group and begins to build a membership or invitation list for the group.

The facilitator can then ask the family to spend a few minutes listing a small number of core, supportive people to invite to the first GAP meeting. The facilitator can also assist the family in developing an agenda for the first meeting, or a list of things to accomplish by the end of the first meeting.

What does a facilitator do?

- Provides framework or structure for the meeting.

  Before beginning discussion on any one issue, it is helpful for everyone to have a basic outline of the topics that will be discussed at the GAP. This can either be provided verbally by the facilitator or it can be written out as an agenda. We suggest that the facilitator provide a written agenda because this gives people something concrete to look at and refer back to.

- Sets comfortable pace.

  Progress is essential to keep people motivated in the GAP process. The facilitator must, however, balance the idea of making progress with the idea of trying to keep people from feeling overloaded and overwhelmed. As a result, it is important that the facilitator ensure that the group prioritizes the issues or goals and discusses one at a time.

- Sets positive and enthusiastic tone.

  Though one should not ignore problems, it is easy to put too much emphasis on them. As a result, it is important for the facilitator to always point out the positive aspects if they are being overlooked. This allows people to see the good things that can happen or that have happened. It can help people feel good about their involvement. In addition, this will help keep members' enthusiasm and motivation high.

- Encourages open, honest discussion.

  The facilitator must emphasize the confidentiality of the GAP group (i.e., anything discussed in the group stays in the group). The facilitator also asks lots of open-ended questions (i.e., questions that cannot simply be answered with a "yes" or "no") and encourages the use of "I" statements (e.g., "I feel frustrated and cut-off when Jeff interrupts me" rather than "Jeff always interrupts me!"). This encourages people to talk only for themselves and not others. In addition, the use of attacking language or sarcasm should be avoided. These can easily provoke a defensive, argumentative response or cause the person to withdraw from the group. These are things that can lead people to believe that their input is not respected or valued.

- Provides information and feedback.

  Whenever necessary, the facilitator may offer helpful information about services, community resources, next steps, etc. The facilitator can help brainstorm a broad array of options because sometimes GAP leaders and family members are not aware of the full range of possibilities. Also, the facilitator may act as a role model by providing informative, nonjudgmental feedback to group members.

- Maintains neutrality and objectivity.

  The facilitator should attempt to remain neutral in the decision-making process. This is important because it keeps the group from perceiving the facilitator as the person with all the answers. The facilitator, however, can offer suggestions that others may have missed. One of the few times when neutrality should be broken is when the facilitator feels as if the GAP leader's wishes are being ignored or a member's comments have been overlooked. At this point, neutrality is broken just long enough to stress the importance of considering all points of view, especially the view of the GAP leader.

- Involves everyone.

  The facilitator ensures that everyone has opportunities to contribute. The facilitator should direct specific questions to individuals who have not had a chance to participate. In addition, he or she should tell people, either directly or indirectly, when they are dominating the discussion (e.g., "Sally, you've given us lots of helpful information. Let's hear what others may have to say."). Most importantly, the facilitator needs to ensure that the GAP leader has ample opportunities to provide input and have the input valued.

- Gains closure on each issue before moving on.

  Before switching topics during the meeting, the facilitator should summarize the main points of the discussion and ensure that everyone understands and is satisfied with the outcome.

- Summarizes.

  Every meeting should end with a clear summary of the issues discussed, what was decided, and what assignments members have for the next meeting. Clear assignment of tasks ensures that members will be held accountable for their part of the process.

Key Players

GAP Leaders/Parents

At this initial planning meeting, the family and GAP leader can talk with the facilitator about what they would like the GAP to accomplish. The family can use this planning meeting to see if the facilitator will be a good match and to get any questions answered. Initial conversations need to focus generally on the GAP leader's visions for the future and the specific priorities that he or she would most like to address. As visions and preferences begin to be identified, the GAP leader and family can begin thinking of supportive people they would like to invite to the first GAP meeting. After these people have been designated, another important decision is to determine who will issue the invitations and how that will be done. The GAP leader may have both the motivation and skills necessary to invite support, or he or she may need various levels of assistance to carry out this initial task. Regardless of how invitations are issued, GAP leaders should have the opportunity to enhance their motivation and skills in reaching out to others,

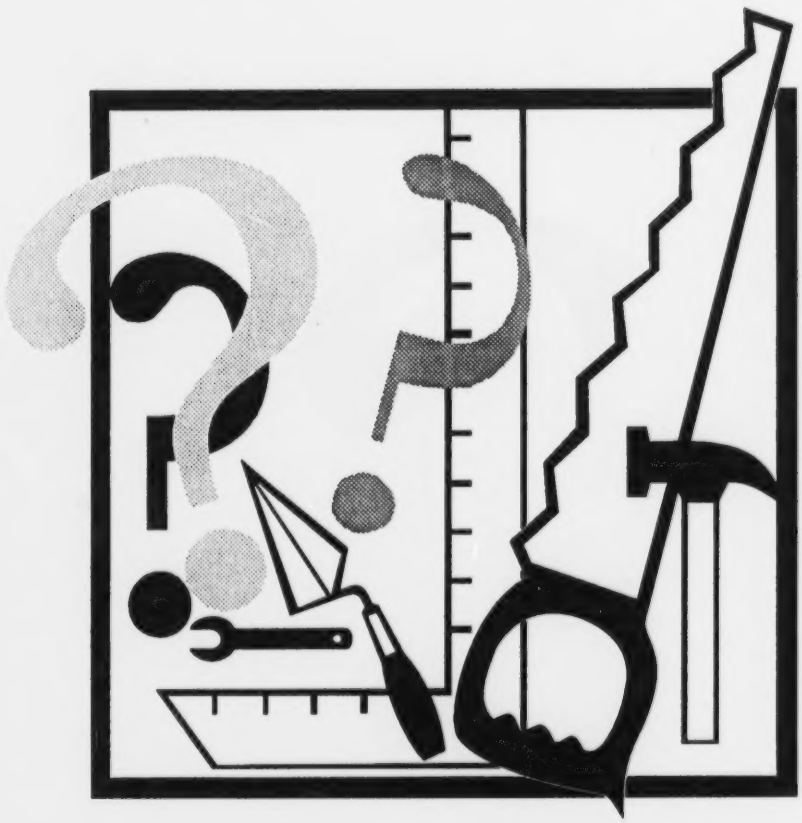
explaining the rationale for this process, and inviting participation in it.

Logistics for the first GAP meeting need to be arranged, including location, time, and refreshments. Major consideration needs to be given to comfort and connection so that the Action Planning Group can, from the outset, develop the social ambiance that distinguishes GAP from traditional planning meetings.

Summary

By the end of this initial planning meeting, the GAP leader and family should have an idea of what a GAP group is and how it might be helpful. Everyone should be beginning to envision new possibilities for the future. The first GAP meeting should be planned, and everyone should know what they need to do to prepare (e.g., where will the first meeting take place, who will arrange refreshments, who will send invitations, etc.). After setting the time, the place, the agenda, and issuing invitations, all that remains is attending the first meeting.

Tips and Tools



Positive Facilitator Characteristics to Look For

- Trustworthy
- Committed to the idea of self-determination and being part of a GAP
- Strong listening and communication skills
- Strong problem-solving skills
- Good social skills
- Ability to connect verbally and emotionally with all group members (i.e., comfortably revealing appropriate amounts of personal information, making eye-contact, ability to empathize and verbalize understanding of how others are thinking or feeling)
- Ability to balance structure and rational problem-solving with warmth, openness, and flexibility
- Ability to energize and motivate people with the belief that practically anything is possible
- Sensitivity to the issues that people with disabilities confront
- Basic knowledge of health and social service systems
- Ability to see problems in environment, not just with the individual and/or family
- Ability to see strengths, not just weaknesses
- Patience
- Good sense of humor
- Positive self-esteem
- Self-confidence

Basic Communication Skills for Facilitators [3]

- Listen actively. Lean forward, directly facing the person. Give eye contact to express your interest in what the person is saying. Nod and smile, offer encouraging responses, such as Yeah, Go on, Really, I understand, Mm-hm, Right, Uh-huh, Yes, I see. Focus on the content of what the person is saying, as well as what they might be feeling (notice the person's voice and body language).

- Paraphrase and reflect statements and feelings. After listening to the other person, restate the content or the feelings that he or she has communicated in order to get feedback about the accuracy of your understanding of the situation. For example, "If I'm understanding you, this has been a highly frustrating situation," or "It sounds like this situation has been a nightmare for you!" After reflecting, encourage the person to continue talking.

- Ask questions (both informational and clarifying). Informational questions are asked to prompt discussion of new information and should be formed as an open-ended question (i.e., one that cannot be answered with a one-word response). Clarifying questions are asked to ensure understanding of what has been said.

- Summarize (to see if you have heard and understood the other person). Summarizing involves reviewing the main themes and feelings the person has expressed in order to understand the situation more clearly. Begin with a phrase that introduces the summary (e.g., "Let's go over what we have discussed so far," or "Let's review the options we've talked about"). Then clearly and concisely summarize the content and feelings that have been expressed and ask "Is that about right?" or "Has that summed it up?" Next, listen to see if the other person confirms or disagrees with your summary. If the person does not completely agree, ask open-ended questions such as, "What did I leave out?" or "What else did we talk about?" Continue summarizing and asking for feedback until the person agrees that all pertinent information has been reflected.

Facilitation Strategies for Achieving Mutual Goals [4]

- Accepting statements. Reflect respect and acceptance for the other person, for example, "I'll bet if we put our heads together, we can come up with a solution," or "I'm glad you mentioned that. That's an idea we really need to think about." Seek information and advice, and avoid criticizing, blaming, and disapproving statements.

- Genuine compliments or statements of appreciation. Acknowledging someone's expertise and stating how he or she is valued can foster positive relationships. For example, "I've noticed how much time you've spent on this. It really shows!" or "I really respect your judgment in this area because ..."

- Empathic statements. Demonstrating that you can personally relate to what the person is saying and identify with his or her feelings emphasizes the equality of the partnership. For example, "I can see how that was frustrating for you. A similar situation happened to me, and I was mad for days," or "Wow, I'm beginning to understand what you've gone through. I know it would have been hard for me to deal with this on a daily basis." Avoid offering lengthy descriptions of your own struggles and triumphs, telling the person how he or she "should" feel, or attributing motives for the person's emotions or actions.

- Agreement statements. After listening to the other person's suggestions, look for the common ground. Focus on the parts of the suggestion that you support, rather than focusing on the points that you disagree with. For example, "Having a solution that includes Diana taking responsibility for getting to work on time is something I really support," or "I really agree that the solution we choose needs to include better communication. Let's see what other components we need to add to this suggestion." Avoid negative judgments and put-downs.

- Productive solution statements. Offer productive solution statements phrased as suggestions that addresses the concerns of both parties. For example, "Here's an idea for us to consider. What about a solution that incorporates....?" or "Here's another idea to add to our list of options. How about .....?" Avoid commanding, threatening, moralizing, and advising.

Helpful Facilitation Questions for Ground Breaking Meeting

Facilitators can use this "cheat sheet" to help facilitate the first meeting and beyond. It contains services and primary contacts in six different areas of life, with space for the facilitator to fill in names and phone numbers. There are also prompting questions which the facilitator can use when helping the participants think about their vision of the future and the goals they need to set to get there.

Employment

Questions to ask...

Is the person currently working? Is it a paid position or a non-paid position? (Think about Child Labor Laws, Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), hours and pay sources) What kind of work experience does the person have, where has s/he worked before? What are his/her interests? Has s/he ever been evaluated in terms of employment? (Vocational Rehabilitation Unit, Interest Assessments?) If he or she is not currently working, is s/he interested in finding a job? What about five years from now, building experience for the future?

Contact Names Phone Numbers

People to invite to the GAP meeting...

Co-workers / Supervisor
Family / GAP leader connections
School personnel
- Vocational Coordinator
- Teachers
- Job Coach

Vocational Rehabilitation Unit (VRU)
Employment Centers
Job Service
Independent Living Center
Generic Employment Agencies

Living

Questions to ask...

Where is the person currently living? Where does s/he want to live five years from now? (apartment, trailer home, house, supported living, parent's home / rent/buy?) With whom does s/he want to live? (family, friends, alone, significant other?) What can we do now to make the vision a reality? How is it going with the current living situation? Any problems, issues to deal with now?

Contact Names Phone Numbers

People to invite to the GAP meeting...

Roommates / Landlord
Attendants, paid staff
Social Rehabilitative Services (SRS)
Section 8 / HUD Housing
Independent Living Centers

Transportation

Questions to ask...

How does the person usually get around? (Bus, cab, driving their own car, their parents' car, carpooling, etc.) Is transportation an issue? Does s/he know how to access public transportation? Is s/he interested in obtaining a driver's license? Taking Driver's Education classes?

Contact Names Phone Numbers

People to invite to the GAP meeting / Resources...

Cab Company
Bus Company
Para Transit Systems
Carpooling (friends, families, co-workers)
Bicycling / walking / etc.
Driver's Education Teacher
Driver's License Examiner

Financial

Questions to ask...

Does the person currently have a bank account? Checking or savings? Does s/he know about banking procedures, making deposits, withdrawals, charges, etc.? Does s/he have a budget? Does s/he need financial aid or food stamps? Is there something s/he needs to be saving for, something they want to do or buy? Do they know how to purchase something from a store? What skills are they going to need five years from now (budgeting, paying bills, saving, etc.)? Are there issues regarding guardianship or conservatorship?

Contact Names Phone Numbers

People to invite to the GAP meeting...

Service Providers, Case Managers
Conservator / Guardian
Advocacy and Protective Services
Social Security (SSI)
Social Rehabilitation Services (SRS)

Social

What questions to ask...

What does the person do for fun now? What outside activities does s/he participate in now? Does s/he play any sports? What about friendships? Dating? This is a big issue for many people with disabilities and there are not a lot of solutions, need to be creative here.

Contact Names Phone Numbers

Who to invite to the GAP meeting / Resources...

Parks and Recreation
Natural Ties
Best Buddies
The Arc
School Groups / Social Activities
Classmates / Circle of Friends
GAP leader/family connections
Church
Neighbors
Athletic Clubs

School Issues

What questions to ask...

How are things going at school? Are you pleased with your educational program? Your transition plan? What about the process, IEP, ITP, inclusion, speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, circle of friends, etc. Are your son's or daughter's needs being met? How is the communication between the school and the family? Are people being held accountable, are goals and objectives being met? Is there anything you would change about school? Would you like to return to school, earn a diploma, get your GED? Are you interested in post-secondary education?

Contact Names Phone Numbers

People to invite to the GAP meeting...

School Personnel
- Inclusion Specialist
- Transition Specialist
- Teachers
- Para Professionals
- Physical/Occupational Therapists
- Speech Therapist
- Job Coaches
- Counselors
- School Administration
- Student Services representative from college or university

The Arc, Advocacy
Primary care givers, family, etc.

Sample Invitation List

Me (Sara)
Mom, Dad, Suzy (Sister)
Mary (Facilitator)
Mrs. Jones (Teacher)
Rachel (Friend)

Sample Invitation

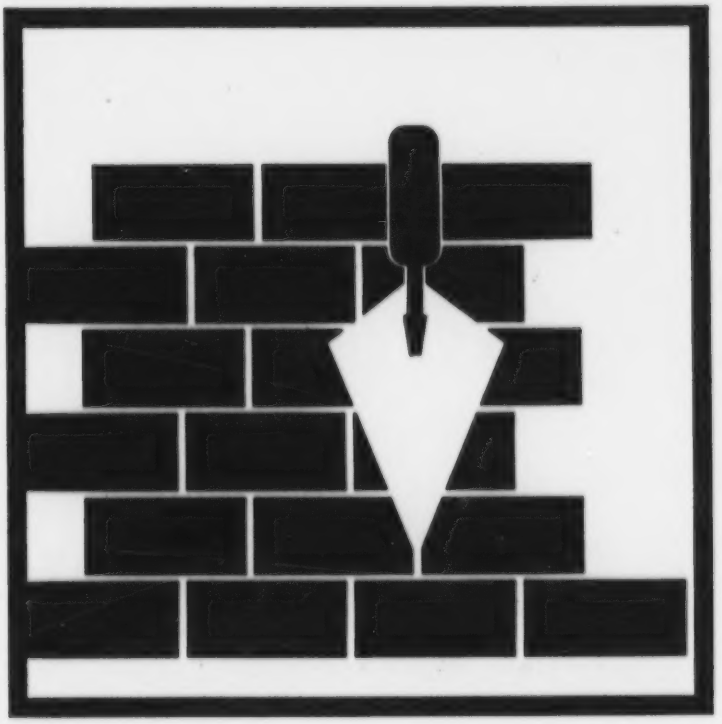
Dear Rachel,

Please come to my GAP meeting at my house on Wednesday at 7 pm. We will have pizza and we'll talk about my schedule at school. See you soon!

Sara

P.S. The agenda is enclosed. Call if you have any questions.

Laying Foundations



Overview
Facilitation
Key Players
Summary
Tips and Tools

Laying Foundations

"A lot of the people involved [in the GAP] were representing different agencies, school, etc., and were not very experienced in collaborative efforts. So, this was a wonderful opportunity to become experienced in that.... Service providers [need to become] acquainted with the idea that they are not a service recipient's entire world, that in fact it is incumbent upon them to work with other service providers in the best interest of the people receiving the services. That, I think, the GAP has really, really facilitated service providers getting some experience."

"Well, I think it made all the difference in the world in his life. Because, there was a group of people, it wasn't just the parents standing alone trying to advocate for their son. Because it was a group of people saying - not only have the parents said this and he said this, but all of us say it. As if it's any more valid. But outside people felt like it was, and he was able to have the opportunity to be a part of the high school. Now whether or not that's made him happier I don't know yet, but he's at least had that opportunity."

"I don't necessarily think it gave the issues more validity, but it certainly made it seem like, to the people at the high school and to the other people that we were involved with that, 'Hey, this group of professionals' (if that, I mean that's kind of funny, because the people who know him best are him and his family, and they should be able to say 'This is what we think is best' and have people respond to that.) But, unfortunately, we have to have, in some cases, more people standing as a group to say, 'Here's what we see is best.' I think the other thing that it did, it was an objective force for the family. It's hard when you're a parent of a child, any child, to be objective all the time. And then when you have a child with a disability and you have to fight one battle after another just to get the same resources that another student has. It's hard sometimes, when faced with circumstance, to be objective in every case. I think it [GAP] allowed that objectivity for the parents, a lot of them, to step back and say 'Wait a minute, here's all the views, and here's how we as a group are going to approach this issue.' It also gave support to the family and to him and to communities around him. It's provided support to his teachers, to the high school, to his family, offered suggestions and ideas, and there were up times and down times, but during the down times, you at least knew you had the other people in the group to depend on one another."

Overview

The first meeting is critical to the development of both the group and the action plan. It is the time to establish relationships among family members, other group members, and the facilitator, as well as to begin the process of setting goals and reviewing objectives. In the first meeting, the group should work to establish a safe and trusting environment, arrive at a vision, prioritize goals, outline an action plan, and decide who to include as key players.

At the beginning of this initial GAP meeting, take time for everyone to introduce themselves and get to know each other. During this social time, refreshments may be offered to make everyone feel welcome and comfortable.

Once the group is acquainted, the facilitator can initiate a discussion of the GAP leader's vision for the future. A helpful exercise to facilitate envisioning is to encourage group members to dream of the future. The facilitator assists by asking lots of thought-provoking questions. What are group members' dreams? Where do they want to be five years from now? Most importantly, what are their dreams for the GAP leader's future? Members are encouraged to let their imaginations go, give themselves a perfect world, and dream of the future. Then, with their vision of the future in the forefront of their minds, the group traces their way back to where they are today. They imagine tying a string to their vision (so as not to lose it) and working their way back to today. How can they get to their vision? What things need to happen now? Six months from now? Next year? By graduation? Are there primary or immediate concerns that need to be dealt with right away, or is there a need for steady movement along a certain path? How do they get there from here?

This "envisioning" exercise facilitates the group's elaboration of goals and objectives for the GAP process. The ultimate "vision" is comprised of one or more long-term goals, while accomplishments along the path are short-term goals. The activities the group engages in along the road to these accomplishments are objectives. In this way, the group's discussion is actually a brainstorming of goals. Goals may include graduating from high school, finding a job, making new friends, playing soccer, taking an art class, listening to rock bands, joining a religious organization, living independently, going to sporting or cultural events, or completing and mailing college applications.

Once delineated, these goals are prioritized. Initially, only one or two are adopted as the primary foci of the group. Other goals will be addressed in future GAPs. Remember, this is a process — those other great goals will not go away! While prioritizing goals, remain flexible. Allow for change or modification. This is a supportive and safe place to try something new. The goals should be achievable, but that does not mean traditional or limited.

After the primary goals are chosen, the group discusses the GAP leader's current strengths and needs regarding these top priority goals. Objectives that facilitate accomplishing these goals are elaborated, and tasks that address immediate needs are assigned to group members. The group may also begin to brainstorm key people who might assist the GAP leader in reaching the top priority goals and who may want to attend future GAP meetings.

GAP groups can meet in a variety of settings, the GAP leader's home, a neighborhood restaurant, or the school. Typically, GAPs meet in the late afternoon (after school), or the early evenings (after dinner). The environment of the GAP should be comfortable, fun, supportive, and productive. The facilitator plays a key role in establishing the environment as s/he sets the tone and pace of the meetings.

Facilitation

In the initial stages of any group, the role of the facilitator is obviously an important one. In addition to the guidelines for facilitation outlined in the previous section, there are some special considerations for this first GAP meeting.

- Establishing ground rules

The facilitator establishes trust and encourages cohesion among members by providing

some necessary (although not hindering) structure. People feel more at ease when they know the ins and outs of a new situation. The facilitator can initiate a discussion about the rules the group may want in order to feel comfortable. Is what is said in the group kept in the group (confidentiality)? Do members want to include food? How are new members invited to attend future meetings? Deciding upon some basic ground rules will go a long way in building a trusting, working GAP group.

• Encouraging communication and participation

The facilitator encourages communication and participation from all members. It may be helpful to consider the family and group as an interdependent system, where each person's actions affect the entire group. In this initial meeting, with the focus on deriving and prioritizing goals, considering the effects of a given goal on the GAP leader as well as the family as a whole is paramount. The effective facilitator will take note of conflicting opinions, and work toward arriving at goals that are achievable for the family system. Guidelines for brainstorming and goal-setting are included in Tips and Tools section. In addition, decision-making and conflict negotiation skills are necessary tools for any group facilitator (and will be explored in our chapter on Building Bridges).

• Ensuring movement - instilling motivation

At this initial stage, it is paramount that the facilitator demonstrate enthusiasm, encourage group member involvement, and model active participation in accomplishing tasks. Facilitators are instrumental in setting the expectations of group membership by delineating the goals the group has chosen, and clearly stating the tasks needed to arrive at the group's common mission. At this first meeting, facilitators may take the lead in eliciting members to work on certain tasks for the next meeting. Furthermore, sending an agenda with assigned tasks for the next meeting is a helpful reminder for members to come to the next GAP prepared.

Key Players

As the group examines each goal and objective, key players necessary to achieving their vision will become apparent. Don't be afraid to invite new people to the meeting. Including lots of supportive people in the process is very beneficial; however, considering the needs and comfort level of the family is the most critical factor in inviting support. If a given family desires more connections, but is very isolated, they may not have the social skills or resources to broaden their support network. In such cases, the facilitator may need to provide extra help in initiating invitations to key players. In other cases, a family may appear isolated, but in fact want to maintain their privacy. In such cases, keeping the group more intimate is preferable. The bottom line — Move at the pace of the family and the GAP leader. Maintain a safe environment.

In summary, the key players for any given GAP will vary depending upon the family, the community, and the needs of the GAP leader. Below are some key players that frequently attend the first GAP meeting.

GAP Leader/Parents

While the family has been prepared in the initial planning meeting with the facilitator, the arrival of the first official GAP meeting may be met with a mixture of excitement, fear, and uncertainty. Frequently families with a child with disability are accustomed to considerable isolation. Having a roomful of helpful friends and professionals may be overwhelming! The facilitator can

be helpful in creating a relaxed social atmosphere by initiating introductions, and providing some information about GAPs. In addition, the GAP leader and family can share some of their unique hopes for their GAP process.

At this first, and all other, GAP meetings, the GAP leader and her/his parents are the primary decision makers. One parent likened his family's role in GAP meetings as being the "Chairpersons of a Board of Directors." While the other group members were instrumental as "consultants," providing ideas, resources, and encouragement, he, his wife and daughter were "top level management" with the bulk of the responsibility.

While the GAP leader and his/her parents are ultimately responsible for what goals are chosen as primary, they may or may not come to this first meeting with a vision for the GAP leader. Encouraging them to brainstorm with the rest of the group is important. Other members may offer perspectives never before considered by the family. Furthermore, making decisions is stressful; having a group of supportive, skillful, and resourceful people available to help make decisions, act as a sounding board, or provide comic relief can go a long way in decreasing the stress that an isolated family often experiences. Finally, GAP groups often offer the GAP leader and family the opportunity to be supportive and helpful to other members who are experiencing change or stress in their lives as well. Helping others can do wonders for one's self-esteem!

Facilitator

Much of the facilitator's roles and responsibilities were elaborated in the previous section on facilitation. To summarize, the facilitator's chief responsibilities include creating a safe and comfortable environment for the group, encouraging communication and participation, and ensuring movement by demonstrating enthusiasm, encouraging group member involvement, and modeling active participation in accomplishing tasks.

Educators

If the GAP leader attends school, including his or her teachers is beneficial for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the teacher works closely with the GAP leader on a daily basis, and hopefully offers an important perspective on the GAP leader's educational strengths and needs. Secondly, the teacher may offer insight into the GAP leader's peer interaction, the overall social climate at the school, and the possibilities for inclusion. Thirdly, educators are intimately involved in the writing of the GAP leader's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and therefore provide an invaluable link to the school system. Finally, teachers can usually benefit from a more holistic view of their students; GAPs provide a setting whereby the whole individual - student, child, sibling, friend, employee - is accessible.

Service Providers

Service providers include many different professionals within the community. Social service workers, advocacy specialists, job coaches, home health nurses, physicians, mental health counselors, occupational therapists, speech, language and hearing specialists, are just a few of the many possible individuals included in GAPs.

Frequently the service professionals that attend GAPs change as the needs of the GAP leader and family change. At one point advocacy issues may be paramount, at another time transition issues, or assistive technology concerns. This changing membership points to an essential

aspect of GAP — Visions are dynamic! Goals are constantly being examined and altered to meet the developmental needs of the GAP leader and his/her family.

Lastly, it is important to note the reciprocity service providers often experience as GAP members. Not only do they offer much to GAP meetings, but also the GAP group provides an excellent opportunity to broaden their professional network within the community.

Friends/Peers

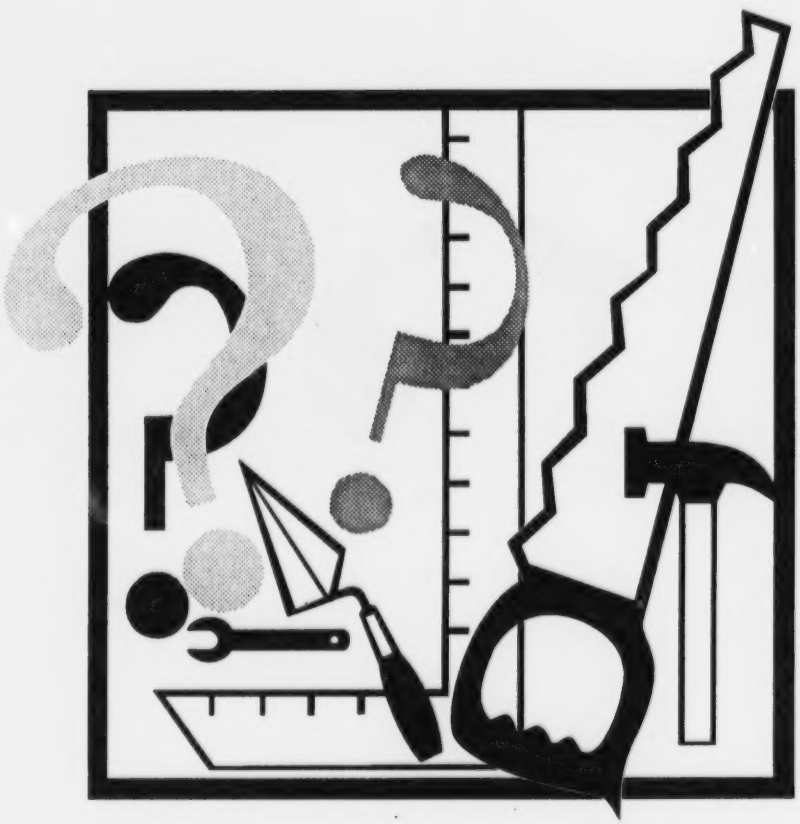
Perhaps the most significant members of GAP groups are the GAP leader's peers and friends, both with and without disabilities. Peers often facilitate a greater understanding of the GAP leader's perspective, particularly to adults who may not recall the workings of an adolescent's mind! Peers may offer visions, goals, objectives that may never occur to adult members. Including peers also makes the meetings more festive, more lively, which keeps members interested and energized. Finally, including peers may further facilitate the GAP leader's inclusion with other students at school.

While having peers present is obviously beneficial, it is often not easy to accomplish. Adolescents often have busy lives, and may not recognize the value of working with a student with a disability. Some ideas that may help invite peer involvement are approaching already established extracurricular groups at the high school, encouraging the GAP leader to join such a group, or talking with the school newspaper about GAPs in general or about disability issues.

Summary

At the end of the first meeting, the group should have an outline of the primary goals and objectives. The group with all the key players can outline the path in more detail in future meetings. In addition, the group should have a list of people to invite to the next meeting, and a plan for inviting these key people. Before ending this first meeting, the group should review the goals and tasks that were assigned, decide where and when the next meeting will be, and what the tentative agenda will be.

Tips and Tools



Brainstorming

Brainstorming is paramount to arriving at the GAP leader's and the group's vision for the future. Each group is unique; therefore facilitating a brainstorming process that is open, creative and nonjudgmental encourages a group to move in their own unique direction. Remember that the more involved members are in establishing goals and objectives, the more likely they are to be invested in the accomplishment of those goals. Below are some basic guidelines for facilitating effective brainstorming:

- Set a specific amount of time
- List as many ideas as possible
- Do not explain ideas
- Do not judge ideas
- Be silly, be outrageous — you never know what ideas will work or what they will inspire in others.
- Write down all ideas for discussion later

Goal-Setting

Goal-setting is pivotal to this first meeting and beyond! The support, resources and information accessed by GAPs provide an excellent environment for helping GAP leaders envision their future and gain the skills to achieve that vision. Goals can be either short-term or long-term in focus. Early on, the facilitator takes an active part in modeling the goal-setting process for the group. With time, members will initiate this process on their own. We suggest following the easy steps outlined below. Encourage the GAP leader and group members to envision the process, working their way back from their vision to their current situation.

- Identify the Goal

GAP members should spend a lot of time envisioning the future. Facilitators can ask the GAP leader, "What are your dreams?" "Where do you want to be five years from now?" Group members can also be encouraged to share their hopes and dreams for the GAP leader as well. Let go, create a perfect world and dream of the future. With the vision in the forefront of everyone's minds, trace the way back to today. Tie a string to the vision so as not to lose it and work back. Goals should be achievable, but that does not mean traditional or limited.

- Identify Objectives

Facilitators can ask group members, "How do we get to this vision?" "What things need to happen now? Six months from now? Next year? By graduation?" "Are there primary or immediate concerns that need to be dealt with right away, or is there a need for steady movement along a certain path?" "How do we get there from here?" Prioritize goals and remain flexible, allowing for change or modification. This is a supportive and safe time to try something new.

- Identify Key Players

Looking at each goal and objective, identify key supporters. Ask, "Who do we know that can help the GAP leader achieve these goals? Family members? Teachers? Friends? Counselors?" Don't be afraid to invite new people to support the GAP leader. A broader support system provides more support, resources, options, and a variety of perspectives. Inviting more supporters to become involved is often beneficial.

- Timeline

Outline a reasonable and achievable timeline to meet goals and objectives. The timeline needs to be realistic, and people should know they will be held accountable for their part of the plan. It is often helpful to put deadlines in writing, knowing that the plan can be revised as needed.

- Possible "Road Blocks" and How to Clear Them

Identify potential "blocks" that could interfere with GAP leaders' visions of the future and their identified goals. Consider any obstacles early in the process and identify possible solutions so as not to get "detoured." Utilize resources and the support system that has been developed. Everyone runs into "traffic jams." Don't see a jam as a failure but instead as an opportunity for growth and a chance to learn more about the process.

- Create and Implement Plan of Action

After envisioning the process, make it a reality! Create the plan of action, and get that goal!

Goal Setting as a Road Map

Outline for the First Meeting

1. Social time and refreshments
2. Share dreams for the GAP leader
3. Discuss and prioritize a list of goals
4. Choose one or two top priority goals
5. Discuss current strengths and needs regarding these goals
6. Assign tasks that address immediate needs to group members
7. Brainstorm key people to invite to participate
8. Review the goals and tasks that were assigned
9. Schedule the time, place, and date for the next meeting

Sample Agenda

Sara's First GAP Meeting
January 1, 1996
Sara's Home
1234 Smith Avenue
Sara's Town, Kansas

Goals for meeting:

- Discuss and prioritize Sara's goals.
- Talk about each goal and how to reach it.
- After outlining goals, think of key players to be involved in future meetings.
- Set time, date, place, and people to attend for next meeting.

Sample list of Goals, Priorities & Key People

Sara's First GAP - 1/1/96
Goals, Priorities, & Key People

Goals arrived at through Brainstorming:

1. Residential - Sara would like to move out of family home to an apartment with a friend eventually.
2. Work - Sara is currently volunteering at the local museum. She would like paid employment after graduating high school (in 2 years). She wants meaningful, but not competitive employment. Sara is currently getting Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), and her medical benefits are paid by SRS, so income and medical insurance are not issues.
3. Social - Sara recently went to a party with her mother. She would like other opportunities like that, preferably with peers.
4. Communication - Sara has cerebral palsy which limits her language skills to eye-gaze and pointing. She and her mother would like to explore assistive technology, such as an alpha-talker or liberator.
5. Wheelchair - Sara has grown out of her wheelchair, and it's falling apart! Sara and her mother want to get brand-new wheels!!
6. Health - Sara has had a very healthy year! She is pleased with her doctor.
7. Education - Sara has a new special education teacher this year. This has been the best Fall semester in years!

Priorities:

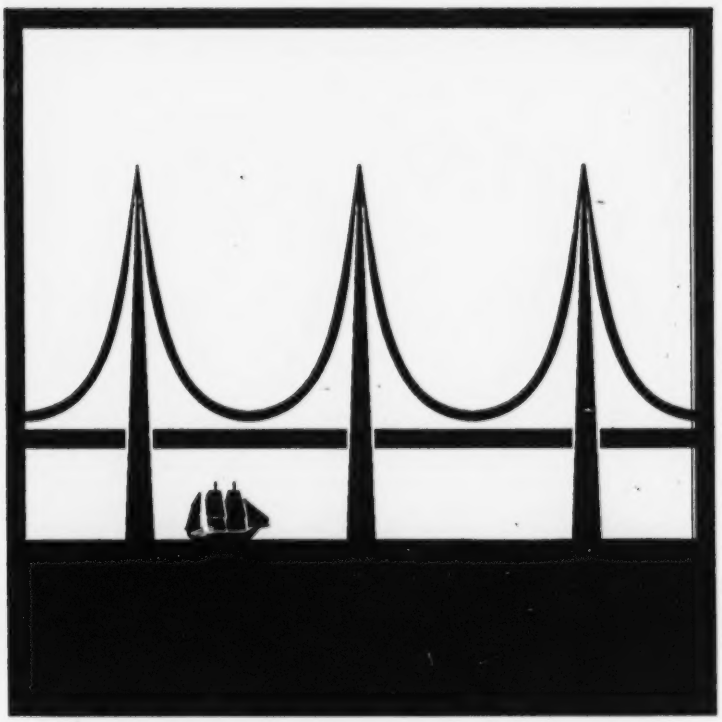
1. New Wheelchair!!
2. Communication - Expanding her communication will affect all other areas, particularly developing greater peer friendships.
3. Social - Building a supportive group of peers at the high school would be great.

Key People to Include in Next Meeting:

1. Sara and her mother
2. Facilitator from Self-Determination Project
3. Teacher
4. School District Speech Pathologist
5. Speech, Language & Hearing Specialist from local university clinic
6. SRS Representative (regarding funding for wheelchair & assistive technology)
7. Former high school student/friend of Sara's

Next meeting is 2/1/96 at 3:00 at Sara's home.

Building Bridges



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"I think she was being educated through the Group Action Planning, through her special education teacher, through my involvement, through [her service provider's] involvement about how to make decisions that we become involved in, in our own life, rather than letting other people make her own choices. She came very, very close to having a legal guardian. That was a real critical turning point, I think, in how she made decisions, obviously, and received services, the support services she requires to live independently."

"[She received support from the GAP in being a self-advocate], and in plans of action, step one, two and three and who was going to do what. It was always outlined at the end of a meeting, and we certainly wouldn't want to show up at the next GAP without our piece of it. And it was, of course, real important to do that, and it worked well. The people involved were conscientious. [The GAP facilitator] always got the list of who was going to do what out at the end of each meeting so that everyone had something to refer to. If you needed to interface with someone else you knew what piece of it they were doing. If you hadn't taken good notes, you still had it on the plan of action."

Overview

After the first meeting, the core group will have a good idea of where they are going and who they need to enlist as supports to get there. Now the work of the GAP group really begins. Goals and objectives are formalized into action plans, and tasks are assigned to members. At each successive GAP, members report on their progress and difficulties in accomplishing their assigned tasks. GAP meetings are times to celebrate victories, reevaluate action plans that are "stuck," and ensure that members are carrying out their assigned tasks. Immediate accountability at each meeting motivates members to accomplish their tasks and gives them the opportunity to share their successes. There is a lot of work happening both inside and outside of the group meetings. If each member takes one or two tasks, then a great number of tasks can be accomplished within a short period of time!

GAP groups can meet in a variety of settings, the GAP leader's home, a neighborhood restaurant, or the school. Typically, GAPs meet in the late afternoon (after school), or the early evenings (after dinner). The environment of the GAP should be comfortable, fun, supportive, and productive. As the group matures, the facilitator plays less of a role in setting a comfortable tone and pace of the meetings; key players, family members, or the GAP leader may assume greater responsibility. Steve, for instance, assumed the role of host during his GAP meetings. He served drinks and baked goods and engaged in conversation at the beginning of the meetings. Not only did he help the group feel welcome, he also benefited by building upon his social skills.

Facilitation

In addition to the guidelines for facilitation outlined in previous sections, there are some special considerations throughout the life of the GAP group.

- Changing leadership responsibilities

As group members acquire experience with the GAP process, they will likely assume greater responsibility for the activities of the group. Members become invested in the group and

the accomplishment of goals. This sense of ownership is critical to the success of the group, and encourages continuing interest and accountability on members' parts.

At this time, facilitators frequently experience a change in leadership responsibilities, with members looking less to them for answers and more to each other. This shift does not indicate that the facilitator is no longer needed. Rather the work as facilitator is more subtle. While continuing to support the GAP leader and ensure open and honest communication between group members, the facilitator also intervenes when the group is experiencing sustained inertia, or being monopolized by one member, or forgetting to seek the GAP leader's opinion, for example. Facilitation of the GAP group becomes a balance between encouraging member leadership and intervening when necessary.

• Knowing when and how to intervene in rough spots

As the group progresses toward their vision for the GAP leader, they may stumble upon "road blocks" or "pot holes." Facilitators may find the group facing any of the following obstacles: the group loses focus; the family is isolated from community resources and services; the GAP leader's ability to participate is challenged by shyness or communication difficulties; or a member is monopolizing conversation. And these are just a few! Such obstacles can often be overcome, if not prevented, by skilled facilitation. We have included a special chapter, "Pot-Holes & Road Construction," that discusses facilitating in the midst of such obstacles.

• Continuing Education

During the life of the GAP the facilitator often assumes the role of educator or guide by introducing new concepts and ideas. Some skills that are invariably valuable to most groups include decision-making, conflict negotiation, and negotiation. In our Tips & Tools section, we talk about these necessary skills.

• Transitioning to a new facilitator

Ideally, facilitators remain involved throughout the life of a GAP. But, any number of reasons can result in a change in facilitator, from a geographic relocation to a change in employment. Regardless of the reason, a smooth transition is imperative to the continued success of the GAP group. The present facilitator can ensure such a transition by following some simple guidelines:

1. Allow adequate time for selecting and transitioning a new facilitator by announcing the change as soon as possible.
2. Meet with the GAP leader and family separately to discuss their preferences for facilitators.
3. Once a new facilitator is chosen, schedule another meeting with the GAP leader and family to discuss the GAP process (if he/she is new to GAPs). Consult our chapter entitled, "Ground Breaking" when planning this meeting.
4. Co-facilitate one or two GAP group meetings prior to ending with the group as a way of modeling appropriate facilitation skills, and introducing the new facilitator to the group as a whole. Let the group know that you will be following up in a few months to see how they are doing.
5. Contact the new facilitator and family in a few months to see how the group is progressing.

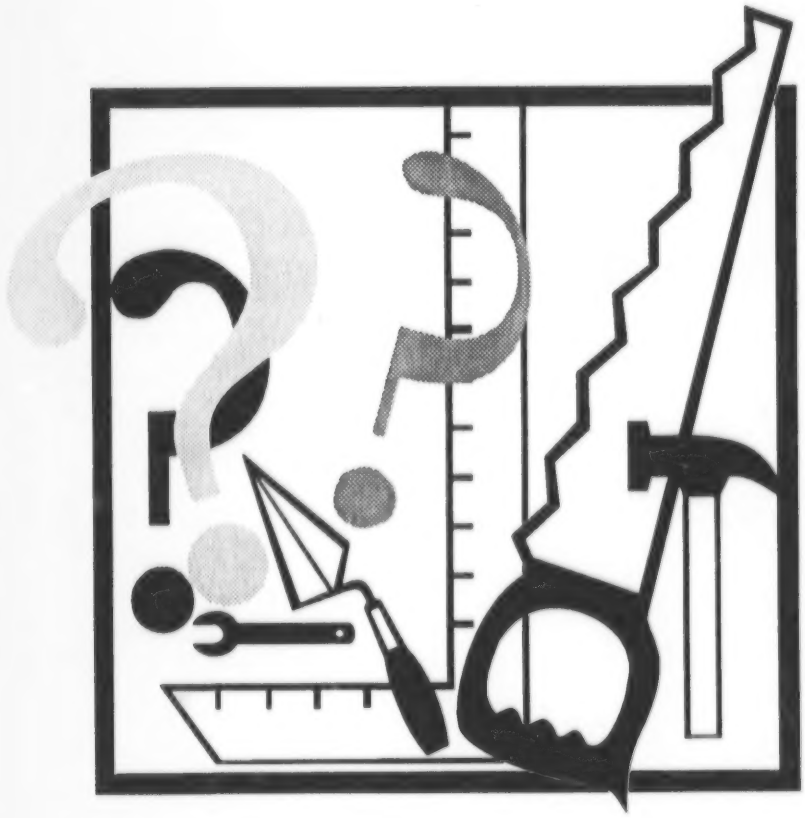
Key Players

The group will mature and continue to grow as they accomplish their goals and objectives. Membership may wax and wane as issues come and go; however a core group of supporters will remain. This genuine support is long-term and essential to releasing the family and the individual from isolation. One of Steve's service providers spoke of her hopes for the future of the Action Planning Group, "... Our primary job as a GAP group should be to develop a group that stays on forever, and that this is an outreaching force that the family will always have and that [Steve] has a community of people around him that can do things. So the paid people come and go — just like always in life, they're picking new jobs and doing new things — but [Steve] always has this network of people that are there to support him."

Summary

If you see that tasks are being assigned, accomplished, and change is in the making, congratulations! Your GAP group is off and running. If you are experiencing difficulties, refer to our Pot-Holes & Road Construction chapter.

Tips and Tools

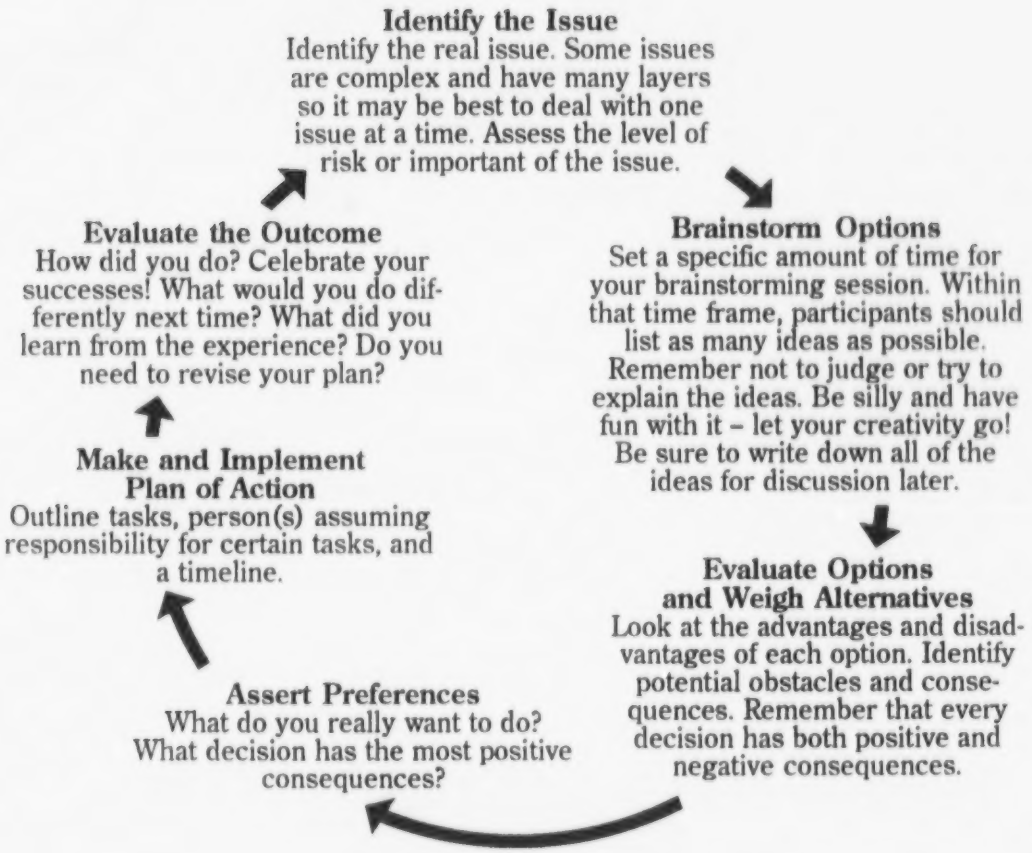


Decision Making

There are many resources available on decision-making, some of which are listed in the resource section of this manual. We have outlined a simple process that group members can learn and use as they refine their decision-making skills (see Figure 1). While group members are ultimately responsible for this process and its outcome, the facilitator can prompt consecutive steps and ensure that all of the options have been identified.

As the GAP leaders learn and work through the decision-making process within the action planning group, they gather valuable knowledge about themselves, their desires and needs, and their preferred modes of interacting with others. They also create situations and experiences where they will gather valuable knowledge about their ability to implement the decision-making process. Possessing decision-making skills provides GAP leaders with a method for responding to experiences of success or failure. This framework facilitates increased control and choice in the GAP leaders' lives. GAP leaders are encouraged to make decisions in a personal and meaningful way. Whether they experience success or failure, they have acquired skills they can use throughout their lives.

Figure 1:
Decision-Making Process


Identify the Issue
Identify the real issue. Some issues are complex and have many layers so it may be best to deal with one issue at a time. Assess the level of risk or important of the issue.
Brainstorm Options
Set a specific amount of time for your brainstorming session. Within that time frame, participants should list as many ideas as possible. Remember not to judge or try to explain the ideas. Be silly and have fun with it – let your creativity go! Be sure to write down all of the ideas for discussion later.
Evaluate Options and Weigh Alternatives
Look at the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Identify potential obstacles and consequences. Remember that every decision has both positive and negative consequences.
Assert Preferences
What do you really want to do? What decision has the most positive consequences?
Make and Implement Plan of Action
Outline tasks, person(s) assuming responsibility for certain tasks, and a timeline.
Evaluate the Outcome
How did you do? Celebrate your successes! What would you do differently next time? What did you learn from the experience? Do you need to revise your plan?

Conflict Resolution

Even the most well-run GAP is likely to experience moments of tension and conflict between members. Rather than viewing conflict as a major set back, disagreements and misunderstandings can be seen as opportunities to learn from each other, gain a new perspective, or develop a stronger relationship. This mind set is often "easier said than done"; the key lies in the art of conflict resolution skills.

Conflict resolution skills are, quite simply, negotiation. Sears (Ref 5) defines negotiation as a "back and forth discussion designed to reach an agreement when both parties have interests, some shared, some in opposition." She explains that it is a process which yields results "beneficial to both parties, results which preserve the relationship, and results that are better than an imposed solution." Good negotiation requires preparation, communication skills, and a good negotiation model.

Facilitators may introduce these concepts formally by discussion or handouts, or informally by modeling this process when conflict arises.

Before negotiating...

- Be prepared before entering into the negotiation.
- Identify your interests. What do you perceive as the real issues? What do you hope to gain by going through this process?
- What are the other person's interests? What do they perceive as the real issues? What do they hope to gain?
- How have you successfully negotiated in the past? What has worked for you? This is your negotiation style. Know your strengths and weaknesses before entering the process. Know the other person's negotiation style as well.
- What's your time frame? Are you under a deadline?
- Develop your strategy before entering into the negotiation.

During the negotiation...

- Open the discussion by stating your interests and agreeing on the ground rules for discussion.
- Explore both your needs and theirs, share information, listen, acknowledge each other's perspective, ask questions.
- Explore options, get beyond the first few ideas, keep an open mind.
- Summarize the key points, decide on the next steps and a timeline for results.

After the negotiation...

- Evaluate the process.
- Let it go. Work with the solution. At some point you may reenter the "negotiation arena," but for now try out what was agreed upon.

Common mistakes

- Perception that the other side has all of the control and power
- Not recognizing your own strengths
- Getting "hung up" on one issue or one aspect of the process

- Failing to see more than one option
- Having win/lose mentality
- Short term thinking
- Accepting an opinion or feeling as fact
- Accepting a position as final
- Talking too much, listening too little
- Being in a hurry

Getting started... discussion suggestions

- Tackle the easy issues first.
- Acknowledge without committing:
  You make a good point.
  I have not looked at it that way.
- Present other viewpoints without attack:
  Yes...and (instead of yes, but)
  Critics of your position would say...How would you respond?
- If you disagree, give a reason and restate your interest.
- Offer choices between alternatives. Avoid offering choice between something and nothing.
- Test the waters. Give others an opportunity to voice objections.
  Have I addressed all of your concerns?
- Allow for face-saving — permit others to act in accord with their principles, past words and deeds.
- Stress the desirability of reaching an agreement.
- Present both sides of the issue instead of just one.

Negotiation Tips [6]

- Separate the people from the problem. The "people problem" of egos and strong emotions needs to be disentangled from the substantive problem and dealt with separately. The participants should come to see themselves as working side by side, attacking the problem, not each other.

- Focus on interests, not positions. Taking opposite positions obscures what the participants really want to gain from the negotiation. The object is to satisfy both participants' underlying interests.

- Generate a variety of possibilities before deciding what to do. Designing optimal solutions while under pressure and in the presence of an adversary is extremely challenging and inhibits creative problem-solving. Set aside a designated time within which to think up a wide range of possible solutions that advance shared interests and creatively reconcile differing interests. Invent options for mutual gain.

- Insist that the result be based on some objective standard. One participant may be able to obtain a favorable outcome simply by being stubborn. Therefore, agreement should reflect some fair standard independent of either side. By discussing such criteria rather than what the participants are willing or unwilling to do, neither party need give in to the other; both can defer to a fair solution.

Sample Agenda

Sara's 7th GAP Meeting
July 1, 1996
Sara's Home
1234 Smith Avenue
Sara's Town, Kansas

Goals for meeting:

1. *Wheelchair update*
   - Sara and her mother will provide an update on the status of the chair.

2. *Communication*
   - The facilitator, Lucy, was assigned to contact a speech, language & hearing specialist, and invite her/him to the next meeting.

   - SRS caseworker will report on funding options for assistive technology.

3. *Social*
   - Sara's teacher is planning a classroom trip to a health club.

   - Sara will report on the country line dancing class at the recreation center.

Sara's 7th GAP - 7/1/96
Action Plans & Task Assignments

1. *Wheelchair*
   - Sara's mother has secured funding from Medicaid, and the chair is in the final stages of being made!

2. *Communication*
   - A new member was here today: Jeri, a speech, language and hearing specialist. After interacting with Sara, she suggested an alpha-talker or liberator. Jeri will look into renting a device within the next week.

   - SRS caseworker brought information about funding options for purchasing a device. Sara's parents will need to complete the application forms; looks like funding could take 2-3 months.

   - Jeri will contact high school and arrange for school to rent a device until funding is available.

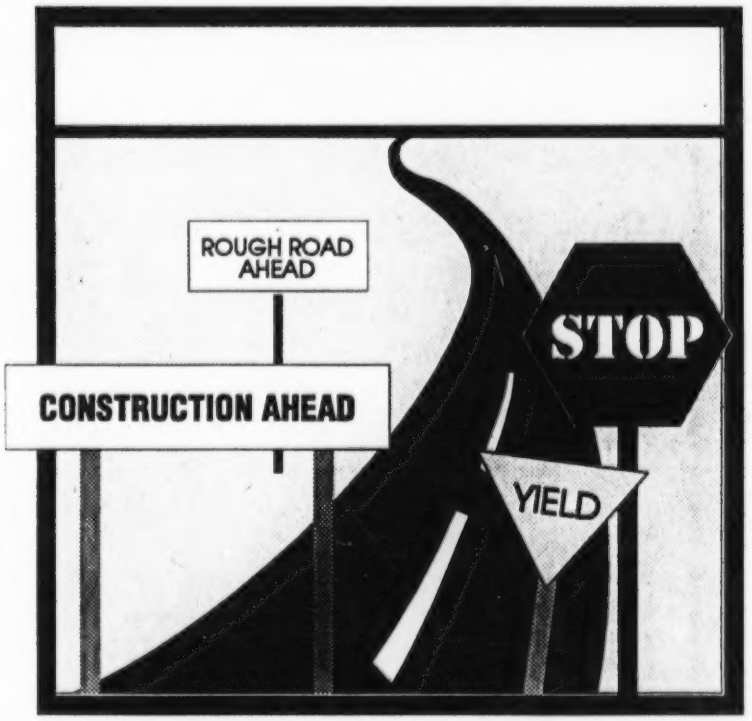
3. *Social*
   - Trip to a health club got canceled - Bummer!

   - Sara started country line dancing class at the recreation center, and is loving it. She'll teach us some moves next month!

   - Sara and her mom are exploring joining a church.

Next meeting is 5/1/96 at 3:00 at Sara's home.

Potholes and Road Construction



"I think she was able to [advocate for herself] because of the self-advocacy training she was receiving. Every chance that [the GAP facilitator] got, she returned the power to her ('What do you think?'). She trained people to not interrupt her, even though she has speech that is slow in cadence and difficult to understand. She began to be more willing to express her opinions and open up."

"If there were things I could change, I would like to see that it [the GAP group] ... stays on forever, and that this is an outreaching force that the families always have and that he has a community of people around him that can do things. So the paid people come and go - just like always in life, they're picking new jobs and doing new things - but he always has this network of people that are there to support him. And that would be my worry, because we always had trouble finding friends of his to be there for expanding our group besides just our core group of people. And so, I hope that can occur so that when he goes into this really important time in his life, that he's got some support in there to make sure that they're still working towards all the things that he wants."

Overview

Now that the bridge has been built, the GAP group is ready to drive across it. There may be some remaining road construction along the way, but keep driving—you'll get there! Even in the best groups, problems can arise. Often, it is the case that hard times are filled with the most learning and progress. Crises are frequently the best opportunity for growth and building group cohesion. Sometimes potential problems can be avoided by noting subtle cues and implementing proactive strategies. Below we discuss several common problems, or potential "potholes," and possible solutions. Numerous creative ways exist to solve any problem; we encourage the reader to build upon our suggestions.

Pothole 1: Running out of Gas

- Goals are overwhelming.
- Group loses focus.
- Group feels stuck.

Solutions:

- Ensure that goals are manageable and achievable.
- In order for group members to experience successes along the way, combine short-term goals with long-term visions.
- Reassess previous goals and engage the group in brainstorming new goals.
- Think about inviting new people.
- Check in with group members for ideas or feedback as to why the group is stuck.
- Use humor to enliven the group. Humor can often change the group's perspective of the problem.

Pothole 2: Lost without a Map

- (Often in the beginning) the GAP leader and/or family are isolated from community resources and services.
- The GAP leader and/or family perceive a lack of available support and therefore are unaware of all options.

Solutions:

- Facilitator needs to have knowledge of the community in order to help connect the GAP leader and family to community resources throughout the life of the GAP.
- Other key players can also provide access to resources and information to de-isolate the GAP leader and family.
- Gather and disseminate relevant written materials to GAP members.
- Broaden resources by inviting other service providers from the community to the GAP.
- Invite GAP members to a workshop with a guest speaker who can present information on relevant community resources.

Pothole 3: Red Lights

- Negative people or "nay-sayers" holding back the group.
- A group member attends only to express anger or negative opinions.

Solutions:

- Work through negative situations; do not ignore them.
- GAP meetings need to be a safe place to discuss negative feelings. Negative feelings are painful but are part of the process at times. Utilize negotiation skills and work through the issues.
- Appoint a "nay-sayer" for each meeting so that potentially negative issues are brought up and dealt with on a regular basis.

Pothole 4: Falling Asleep at the Wheel

- Group members who detract from meeting by not contributing.
- Group members who do not complete their assigned tasks.
- Group members who often miss meetings.

Solutions:

- Facilitator can increase accountability by reminding members of their assigned tasks with an agenda mailed prior to the meeting.
- Review assigned tasks at the beginning of each meeting.
- Ask group members why they are missing meetings. Discuss and reassess their commitment to the group. If they are no longer interested in participating, let them know that leaving is okay. People who can no longer keep their commitment may hinder the group's process.

Pothole 5: Missing your Ride

- GAP leader gets left out.
- GAP leader's ability to communicate or participate is challenged by shyness, speech issues, behaviors, etc.

Solutions:

- Ask a group member to act as an advocate for the GAP leader.
- Encourage group members to always listen to the GAP leader (not interrupt or talk for him or her).
- Facilitator needs to frequently check in with the GAP leader for input and feedback.
- Facilitator should monitor progress of each meeting, always making special note of the participation level of the GAP leader. If the GAP leader is not participating, the facilitator must address the issue. The facilitator can talk with the GAP leader outside of the meeting to make sure s/he is comfortable with the situation or a particular issue. The facilitator could also address the matter openly at the meeting if that is appropriate.

Pothole 6: Back-seat drivers

- Group member competes with facilitator.
- Group member constantly draws attention to herself or himself, monopolizes conversation, has personal agenda.

Solutions:

- Facilitators must always be aware of other group members and the dynamics of their relationships with each other and their relationship with the facilitator. Competition between a group member and the facilitator is a difficult issue to deal with, but the facilitator needs to address it. The facilitator can talk with that person and ask questions such as, "Can you give me some feedback about how you think the meetings are going?" "What would you do differently if you were facilitating the meeting?" "Is there something bothering you?" If the person does not respond to this kind of open communication and the facilitator continues to feel the competition, the facilitator should directly ask the person about it. Remember to use "I" statements and to discuss the issue and not the person. Everyone plays an important role at the meetings, and it is critical that everyone get along.

Pothole 7: "Can I have the keys tonight?"

- GAP leaders' goals are at odds with parents' goals.
- There is conflict within the family system.

Solutions:

- This can be a difficult situation for the family, the group, and the facilitator. Gently point out the noted discrepancy in goals or the conflict, and inquire as to how the family would like to address this difference. Should the group slow down and take smaller steps? What are the points of agreement and disagreement? Would the family prefer to discuss these differences in private?
- Consult the Conflict Resolution section in the previous chapter's Tips & Tools.
- If the conflict appears to be long-standing and not readily resolved, consider suggesting family counseling and offering appropriate referrals.

Pothole 8: Billboards

- Private topics get shared with entire group without GAP leader's consent.
- Group members inappropriately self-disclose.

Solutions:

- Talk about boundaries and the need to respect each other's privacy.
- Remind members of the ground rules that the members established in the beginning about respecting each other, maintaining confidentiality, and what topics are appropriate for group discussion.
- Explore what the member is trying to achieve with his or her disclosure or question. If possible try to rephrase their concerns in a manner more in line with the function of the group.
- If necessary interrupt a member who persists in inappropriately crossing a boundary, breaking a confidence, or making the group unduly uncomfortable with his/her questions or comments. Frequently, a simple reminder that he or she is breaking a group rule works. Remember one of the facilitator's roles is to assure safety for all members.

Pothole 9: "Are we there yet??"

- GAP leader gets bored.
- GAP leader does not participate.

Solutions:

- Ensure that the GAP leader remains the focus of the group.
- Regularly ask the GAP leader for input, opinions, and feedback.
- Ensure that the GAP leader's goals and visions are heard and achieved.

Pothole 10: Car pool, anyone?

- Need for additional friendships and peer involvement.

Solutions:

- Involvement in extra-curricular activities and student groups is an excellent way to increase the GAP leader's peer interactions. With time, some of these new acquaintances may be approached to participate in a GAP.
- Volunteers can be trained to participate in GAP meetings. They can act as advocates for the GAP leader and, if a friendship develops, can accompany the GAP leader to social events that they both enjoy. Volunteers may be individuals who are similar in age to the GAP leader, college students, high school students who are a grade or two older, or someone who has been with the GAP leader's company or employer longer.
- Fostering friendships can breathe new life into people who have a lack of friends and meaningful relationships in their lives. Ask the GAP leader if there is someone s/he would like to invite — someone with whom they are interested in fostering a friendship/relationship. Ask the teachers or employers or others if they know of a person who would be fun to invite to a meeting, someone who has similar interests as the GAP leader.

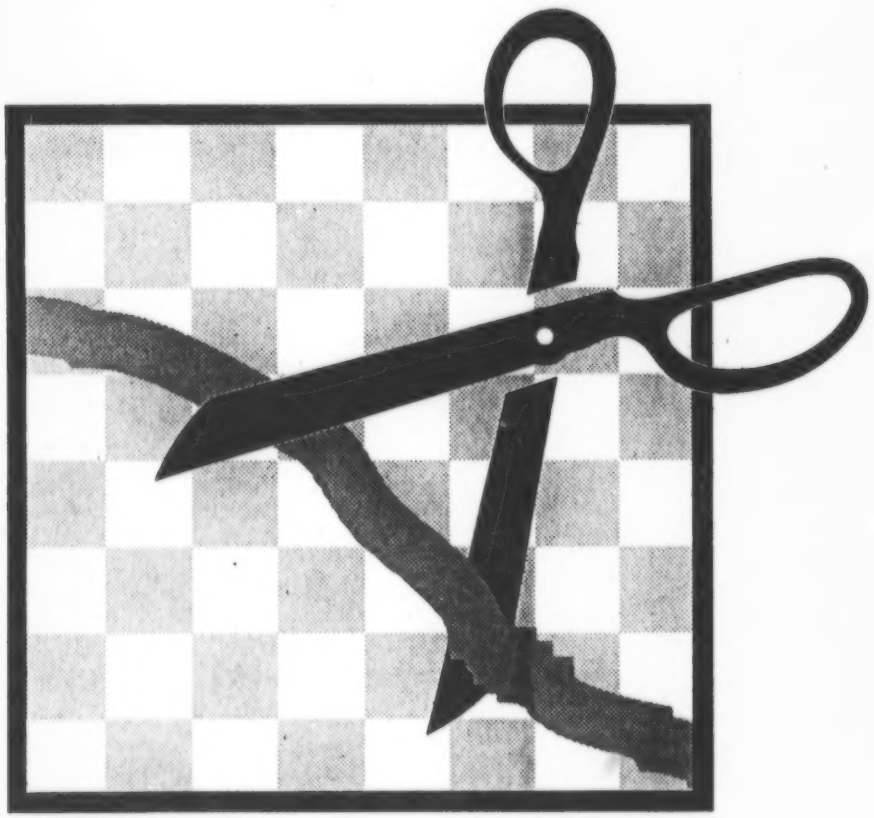
Pothole 11: Blow outs

- Crises.
- Major conflict or arguments between group members.

Solutions:

- Look at the crisis as an opportunity for growth. Invite new members who can provide support or resources for dealing with the crisis. Ask the group to brainstorm and problem-solve. What are the real issues at hand? Because sometimes a person can become upset about a situation due to other things happening in that person's life, remember to deal with one issue at a time.
- Mediation between conflicting parties can be facilitated outside of the regular meetings. If the facilitator feels she or he cannot handle the situation or there is a conflict of interest, maybe bring in another facilitator or a mediator for a few meetings. Of course, ensure that all parties are comfortable with and approve of the new mediator. True mediation allows for both parties to express their concerns and conflicts in a safe, unbiased environment.

Dedication Ceremonies: Ribbon Cuttings



Dedication Ceremonies: Cutting the Ribbon

"Eventually [I see] her taking on that role [of role model] and helping other younger people. I think she's just so personable and she has reaped the benefits of her own advocacy, and I think she realizes that.... One day she didn't have privacy and the next day she did. That's when she changed service providers, and that was very dramatic. One day she had a service provider, and the next day she was self-directed. That was a very dramatic change. It was scary, but at the same time, I think she is really glad she did that. I don't think she'd give it up, where a year ago she was contemplating having less autonomy, rather than seeking more."

"I'm really glad I got to participate in it [the GAP group]. Even though I was a paid person, to be involved, it still was, it was exciting to be working towards common goals and to actually achieve the goals. And there's always a million more things that you'd like to accomplish, you know, and get done, just so he has more and more opportunities. But, I'm glad that the facilitator got me involved in the process. I'm glad it went as well as it did, and I'm glad that the group was able to, with him and his family, actually make a difference at the high school, that will positively affect him this year, and hopefully other students in the future."

"Well, I think it made all the difference in the world in his life. Because, there was a group of people, it wasn't just the parents standing alone trying to advocate for their son."

Overview

Celebrating successes are the "life-blood" of the Group Action Planning process. The group must acknowledge all the work they have done, and all that they have accomplished. Perhaps the best way for us to share this with you is to present some of the things our project participants have accomplished — they are well worth celebration!

Steve.....

Steve is an 18-year-old high school student with moderate cognitive disabilities. Steve has been in a segregated special education setting for most of his life. His mother and father have been very involved in initiating change in Steve's life. The family lives in a university town and has access to many resources. Steve's father has a professional position, and his mother works in the home. Steve likes music, dancing, socializing, and sports. When Steve entered the project, he was identified as having behavior problems. He did not get along well with peers, was not motivated to go to school, and was generally unhappy.

In Steve's case, the family was very involved from the beginning, and the goals were outlined by the family. The mother and father were clearly leading the meetings. As time has passed, we have seen Steve become much more involved in participating in, and even leading, the meetings. His mother and father have responded by asking for his opinions, and other group members look to Steve for input. It is critical to remember that Steve has always been the focus of the group.

Steve at first responded to every question with the answer, "Beach Boys," and his ability to comprehend or contribute to meetings seemed limited. One year later, he is helping to keep the group focused, is seriously considering employment and living options, and expressing his preferences. Steve even takes notes, copying agenda items onto another sheet of paper in the beginning of the meeting. Steve is very perceptive and is a wonderful person to have at meetings as he is so very aware of the emotions in the room. He usually keeps all of us honest about what we are thinking and feeling!

At the end of one year, Steve and his Action Planning Group had accomplished many things. Steve is currently fully included at his high school. He is taking biology, and is participating in the biology club. Steve and his mom won the MTV music award contest — needless to say, he was the envy of all his classmates when he returned from New York. Amazingly enough, Steve is no longer labeled as a "behavior problem." Steve has wanted to work in an office, and now is working in the high school office. He hopes to turn this experience into a paid position in the community. Steve is not the only one who has benefited. His parents are much more connected and aware of the resources available to them. They have a new vision of Steve living in an apartment with a friend.

Katie.....

Katie is a 19-year-old high school student with cerebral palsy who is preparing to graduate. Katie was placed in a special education classroom at an early age, although she has no cognitive disabilities. Katie was raised by her maternal grandmother who died when Katie was 15 years old. Katie was then transferred to a group home for adults with severe and profound mental retardation. Katie wants to work with children after graduation and is interested in looking into post-secondary education. Katie is a bright, competent, and patient woman who enjoys people. When Katie entered the project, she was interested in leaving the group home to live independently, thinking about graduation, and experiencing difficulties being assertive with friends and service providers.

At the end of one year, Katie's life has changed tremendously. She graduated from high school with a standard diploma! She currently lives on her own with support from home care providers that she has hired herself. She is working hard to become her own guardian, which has been a struggle in the courts for over one year now. She is also exploring employment options — working independently to build her communication and literacy skills through programs offered at a local university. Katie is surrounded by many friends including a boyfriend. Katie has become more assertive, and is therefore able to communicate her needs and wishes to the various service providers in her life.

Ann.....

Ann is a 19-year-old high school student with mild cognitive disabilities. Ann currently lives at home with her older sister and parents. Ann is a very caring, patient, quiet person who loves people and animals. When Ann entered the class, she was interested in making new friends, taking different classes, finding a job that she enjoys, and graduating from high school. Ann has been placed in a segregated classroom every year and has never been informed that she has the right to request other classes or even to attend her own yearly planning meeting at school. Because Ann is so quiet and sensitive, she was experiencing difficulties being assertive with friends, family, and teachers.

Ann has always clearly been the leader of her Action Planning group. Her parents have helped Ann understand questions or explain her ideas, but Ann has always outlined the goals and objectives of her group. The facilitator provided information about community resources and Ann's rights and offered support for Ann and her parents during the yearly planning meeting with Ann's teachers.

At the end of one year, Ann has graduated from high school (after completing classes of her choice her senior year) and has a job that she enjoys. Ann is also purchasing new bedroom furniture with her own checking account and is making new friends. Ann has become more assertive, and is talking more openly about her friends, her boyfriend, and her goals for the future.

Sara.....

Sara is a 20-year-old high school student with cerebral palsy who will be graduating in two years. Sara lives with her two guardians. She has no verbal language skills, but is able to communicate with her family by eye gaze and pointing. Sara is energetic and enthusiastic. She has a contagious laugh. Sara volunteers at a senior citizen center in her community, and really enjoys socializing there. She has a good female friend, who also has cerebral palsy, with whom she enjoys spending time. Her family has a rambunctious puppy who keeps Sara giggling!

Sara's action planning groups were busy ones! At the outset of Sara's GAP meetings, her top priorities were the purchasing of a new wheelchair (she had outgrown her old one), broadening her communication skills, and expanding her social network. Group members included her guardians, her high school teacher, case manager, speech pathologist, and friend. GAP members quickly picked up on Sara's nonverbal form of communication. Her laughter was a key in identifying her preferences! Within seven months she had a new wheelchair. By the end of the year she was learning to use a communication device called an "alpha talker." Currently she is planning to use the device at school, with hopes that her growing communication skills will open new avenues for friendships.

RESOURCES

Where to Go from Here—Finding Resources

Self-Determination Projects

Alaska

Increasing Skills Necessary for Self-Determination Through Video-Based Personal Futures Planning
Kathy Ben or John Micks
Center for Human Development: UAP
2330 Nichols Street
Anchorage, AK 99508
(907) 274-6814
(907) 272-8270

Arizona

Project Pride
Marguerite D. Harmon, MS
Community Outreach Program for the Deaf
268 W. Adams
Tucson, AZ 85705
(602) 792-1906

California

Independence Through Responsible Choices
Beverly Huff
Irvine Unified School District
5050 Barranca Parkway
Irvine, CA 92714
(714) 733-1345

Project Capable, Able and Dependable
Stephen Hofmann, MS
West Contra Costa Unified School District/Transition Department
2465 Dolan Way
San Pablo, CA 94806
(510) 741-2892

Colorado

Choice Maker Self-Determination Transition Project
James Martin or Laura Huber Marshall
University of Colorado at Colorado Springs
Center for Educational Research
P. O. Box 7150
Colorado Springs, CO 80933-7150
(719) 593-3627 (Martin)
(719) 593-3540 (Marshall)

Sharing the Journey
Jean Lehmann
Colorado State University
Education Building, Room 205
Fort Collins, CO 80623
(303) 491-5169

Hawaii

Self-Determination in Integrated Settings
Dr. Robert Stodden
University of Hawaii
UAP & Department of Special Education
1776 University Avenue, UA 4-6
Honolulu, HI 96822
(808) 956-5009

Illinois

Mainroads to Self-Determination
Kathryn Moery
Family Resource Center on Disabilities
20 East Jackson Boulevard, Room 900
Chicago, IL 60604
b(312) 939-3513

Developing Self-Determination in Youth
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Self-Determination Program for Transitioning Youth in Prince George's County
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Skills and Knowledge for Self-Determination
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Facilitating the Self-Determination of Youths with Disabilities
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New Hampshire

A Student-Directed Model for the Promotion of Self-Determination
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New Mexico

Self-Determination: The Road to Personal Freedom
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New York

A Demonstration Project to Identify and Teach Skills Necessary for Self-Determination
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Development of a Life Decisions Strategies Curriculum to Promote Self-Determination
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Books, Curricula, and Videos

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National Information and Adovcacy Groups

IMPACT: Feature Issue on Self-Determination
Journal: IMPACT, 6, 1-20, (1993/94)
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Defining Self-Determination: Key Terms

Self-Determination — Self-determination is a system of attitudes, skills, and relationships that develop over time and which are dynamic and fluid. For an individual, self-determination consists of, but is not limited to interdependence, self-regulation, knowledge and acceptance of self, the ability to learn from experiences, internal motivation to learn and utilize skills such as communication, goal-setting, decision-making, and conflict resolution, and most importantly the perception of control and choice in one's life. In the environment, the expression of self-determination is enhanced by responsive, informative, and non-judgmental feedback, the negotiation of constructive limits, the creation of situations that are optimally challenging for the individual, effective communication strategies, and the provision of non-controlling support.

Attitudes — Beliefs about one's self-efficacy, the expectation that one's behavior will lead to a certain outcome, perception of contingency between personal actions and outcomes.

Skills — Problem-solving, decision-making, goal-attainment, assertive communication, self-organization.

Relationships — Systems of support, circles of friends, family, and others.

Dynamic and Fluid — Changes over time, relationships are interactive, process is developmental, a lifetime process that waxes and wanes.

Interdependence — Individual is neither completely dependent nor isolated, but acknowledges and accepts the need for support from others; he or she is able to maintain a sense of self within the context of reciprocal support. Person actively seeks out appropriate support from others.

Self-regulation — The individual is able to govern himself or herself. The person who is self-determining uses information and knowledge to regulate himself or herself in pursuit of self-selected goals. Whitman defined self-regulation as a "complex response system that enables individuals to examine their environments and their repertoires of responses for coping with those environments to make decisions about how to act, to act, to evaluate the desirability of the outcomes of the action, and to revise their plans as necessary." [7]

Knowledge of Self — Ability to recognize strengths, weaknesses, preferences, attributes, and characteristics of self.

Acceptance of Self — Possessing self-knowledge as well as affirming, appreciating, valuing, honoring, and/or respecting oneself. Guess, Benson, and Siegel-Causey suggested that the opportunity for choices and decision-making "reflects favorably upon one's perceived independence, dignity and self-worth...." [8]

The Ability to Learn from Experiences — Ability to respond to success or failure in an adaptive manner that encourages further experimentation and risk-taking but from a more informed position.

Internal Motivation to Learn and Utilize the Skills traditionally identified with self-determination — Internal motivation, not to be confused with intrinsic or innate motivation, is the desire within the individual to achieve goals, make changes, and/or initiate movement in order to meet the individual's needs or wants. Students need to be motivated to problem solve, to set goals, and to communicate more effectively. They must perceive these skills as beneficial and useful in their lives.

***Perception* of Control and Choice in one's life** — The perception, optimally but not always the reality, that one has the power to regulate and direct one's life and that one has the power to select among various options. Perception of lack of control can have detrimental effects on task performance. [9] The belief that a person can determine his or her fate is critical in determining the ways in which he or she copes with stress and meets challenges. [10]

Responsive Feedback — Replying to student's verbal communication and/or behaviors in a sensitive manner that demonstrates an attempt to understand the student's intent prior to replying.

Non-Judgmental Feedback — Replying to student's verbal communication and/or behaviors without finding fault, blaming, or criticizing.

Informative Feedback — Replying to student's verbal communication and/or behaviors by providing knowledge that will benefit the student in achieving his/her goals.

Negotiation of Constructive Limits — Interacting with the student in defining roles, rules, and boundaries in which that individual lives. These limits let the person feel safe and cared for while still providing opportunities to experience and learn from success and failure.

Creation of Situations that are Optimally Challenging for the Individual — Providing decision-making and problem-solving situations that challenge the person, facilitate growth, and foster self-determination. Involves structuring the environment in a way that (1) exceeds student's present level of functioning while still being within the student's ability to succeed, and (2) ensures a multitude of choices including student-initiated activities and choices.

Effective Communication Strategies — Ability and willingness to express needs, wants, opinions, concerns in an assertive manner, as opposed to passive or aggressive manner, while maintaining respect for other's needs, wants, opinions, concerns.

Provision of Non-Controlling Support — Providing information, assistance, and encouragement for person's visions, goals and objectives without imposing restrictions, restraints, and/or influence based on another's personal agenda.

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Correction to

Group Action Planning:

An Innovative Manual for Building a Self-Determined Future

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